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# The psychodynamics of white racism : an historical exploration of white racial pathology as elicited by prizefighters Jack Johnson and Muhammad Ali.

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# THE PSYCHODYNAMICS OF WHITE RACISM:

# AN HISTORICAL EXPLORATION OF WHITE RACIAL PATHOLOGY AS ELICITED BY PRIZEFIGHTERS JACK JOHNSON AND MUHAMMAD ALI

A Dissertation Presented

by

MICHAL LOUISE BEALE

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to GOD ALMIGHTY for making this accomplishment possible. Without GOD nothing is possible!

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**ABSTRACT**

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The psychodynamics of white racism is not a well-theorized phenomenon. Traditional discourse on racism has primarily focused on "black doings and sufferings, not white anxieties and fear" (West, 1993). In other words, approaches to the study of white racism tend to emphasize the general ways in which people of color are adversely impacted by acts of prejudice committed by white people. Approaches that emphasize the victim's experience often obscure the particular ways in which the perpetrators of racism should be scrutinized and analyzed.

This conceptual study is a departure from the traditional perspectives, focusing instead on the perpetrators of racism, white racists. Specifically, this dissertation will examine the psychodynamics of white racial attitudes and actions. In this study, I propose that white racial attitudes are the expression of anti-black feelings and emotions that lie at the core of white racists (Feagin & Vera, 1995). In this study, I explore these feelings and emotions as they relate to black upward mobility, in particular, blacks that are perceived to be a threat to the dominant social and economic power structures.

Unlike the economic approach to examining white racism, which is not concerned with the emotional and psychological elements of racism, the psychological approach views racism in part as an extension of the emotional reactions whites exhibit when threatened by changes in patterns of white domination and black subordination (Schwartz & Disch, 1970). In other words, whites who are racists tend to view life as a zero-sum game in which black gains represent white losses (Feagin & Vera, 1995). This approach to the study of white racism also provides a plausible explanation for extreme manifestations of racism. This is illustrated through the case studies of heavyweight prizefighters Jack Johnson and Muhammad Ali. White reactions to these prizefighters and their behaviors both in and outside the ring are indicative of the psychological dimensions of white racism.

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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Traditional approaches to the study of white racism generally call attention to the ways in which people of color are adversely impacted by acts of bigotry committed by white people. Though relevant to the discourse on racism, approaches that give emphasis to the victim's experience often obscure the particular ways in which the perpetrators of racism should be considered. Whereas blacks have been burdened historically by white racism, whites have benefited from it disproportionately. Hence, to effectively address the problem of white racism, it is imperative that we seek wisdom not in the study of black suffering and degradation, but in the study of the beneficiaries of white racism. In this study I depart from the traditional line of inquiry by focusing on the perpetrators of white racial oppression. More specifically, this dissertation will explore a psychological explanation for white anti-black attitudes and behaviors.

In particular, in this dissertation, I argue that attitudes and behaviors exhibited by whites vis-à-vis black social and economic upward mobility comprise what I consider the psychology of white racism or the psychological dimensions of white racial oppression. In this context, this dissertation employs a number of psychological mechanisms to assist in analyzing white reaction to blacks who are perceived a threat to white supremacy and the social and economic power structures that support this racist ideology.

## The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to propose an alternative explanation for white racism. In much of the recent literature devoted to the explanation of white racism an economic rationale is argued. This approach, which views white racism as a tool utilized by whites to maintain economic dominance over blacks and other people of color

(Takaki, 1993; Winant, 1994; & Lipsitz, 1998), does not effectively address questions such as, "What motivates whites to pursue economic dominance over groups of color?" or "What are the psychological components of economic competition between black and white Americans?" As a mental health professional, I am primary interested in interpreting the attitudes and behaviors of white racists, rather than the outcome or consequences of racism. Therefore, I argue that in addition to being rooted in economic competition, white racism has psychological origins. In this dissertation, the psychological origins of white racism will be explored using generally accepted principles of clinical psychology.

## Significance of This Study

The psychological approach to addressing white racism derives from a fundamental belief that white racism is a white problem that reflects white psychology vis-à-vis blacks in particular, and people of color in general. Therefore, efforts to understand and explain white racism should commence with a systematic examination of white racial attitudes and subsequent behaviors. By utilizing this approach, it is possible to focus on the perpetrators of white racism and the consequences of white racism without implicating the victims of white racism. In other words, by emphasizing the psychological dimensions of white racial oppression, white racists, the inventors and maintainers of racism are implicated and the focus of study. In this context, this study offers a psychological interpretation for individual and cultural expressions of racism, particularly as it relates to white reactions to black political, social and economic advances. Additionally, this study offers a framework for conceptualizing extreme manifestations of white racism, such as lynchings, white supremacist activity, police brutality, and white race riots (i.e., Tulsa and Rosewood). I maintain that all forms of

white racialized violence are reflective of extreme expressions of white racism and are exemplar of white psychology.

## Language Usage

Throughout this dissertation I refer to race as either "black" or "white." I elected to use the term "black" instead of "African-American" because the term "African-American" connotes a more contemporary ethnic rather than racial reference to people of African descent. The use of the word "black," in my opinion, is a more appropriate racial category to describe people of African descent in the historical periods discussed in this dissertation. Likewise, I use the term "white" instead of Caucasian to describe people of European descent. Unlike Chehade (2001) and other race theorists, I use lowercase instead of capitalization when describing racial categories. The terms "black" and "white," are social constructions and therefore do not warrant special consideration. Finally, the terms "Negro," "Nigger," "colored," and "African-American" are used to reflect the spirit of the times and when referencing a direct quote.

## White Anti-Black Racism

The psychological mechanisms of white racism are indicative of the historically charged relationship between blacks and whites in the United States since racialized slavery. This relationship is unique and is predicated on patterns of white domination and black subordination. Given this context, I focus exclusively on white anti-black racism in this dissertation.

## Methodology

My purpose here is to provide a psychological interpretation of white racial oppression. To accomplish this, I have developed a conceptual framework utilizing particular periods and events in United States history to make available evidence for this

psychological argument. In other words, to ground my argument, I analyze particular historical periods and events within these periods from a psychological perspective to offer evidence that white racism is indeed psychological in nature. I refer to this approach as psycho-historical to emphasize this method of analyzing history. My analysis of history is not intended to encompass US history from its inception to the present. Instead, I limit this psycho-historical exploration to the Progressive (1895-1920) and Civil Rights (1954-1965) eras. A psycho-historical analysis of these eras not only establishes the racial context for prizefighters Jack Johnson and Muhammad Ali, the subjects of my case studies, each era is rich with evidence of the psychology of white racism.

In addition to providing a psycho-historical analysis of the Progressive and Civil Rights eras, I reference other historical periods to support and strengthen the selection of psychological mechanisms developed to facilitate the analysis of white reaction to Johnson and Ali in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively. Since the psychological mechanisms utilized in this dissertation are not grounded in a particular psychological orientation such as Cognitive-Behavioral Theory, Psychoanalytic Theory or other more traditional approaches to understanding human behavior, I rely on the framework developed in Chapter 2 to ground this study. Therefore, in this particular study, I attempt to understand and explain the phenomenon of white racism using psychological mechanisms derived from the psycho-historical analysis of white racism.

## Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 is an outline of my rationale for this study and several disclaimers concerning language usage and the focus on white anti-black racism. Chapter 2 is an outline of the conceptual framework for analyzing the psychology of white racism.

The case studies of Jack Johnson and Muhammad Ali comprise Chapters 3 and 4 respectively. My purpose here is to utilize the professional careers of these two prizefighters to elicit the psychology of white racism in two distinct historical contexts, the Progressive and Civil Rights eras. Jack Johnson was the first black heavyweight titleholder, while Ali was the third. Prior to changing his name to Muhammad Ali, Ali's given name was Cassius Clay. I will refer to Ali as Clay when describing his life and events in his life prior to his name change.

Originally, I had hoped to include Joe Louis, the second black heavyweight titleholder to strengthen my thesis. However, due to the magnitude of Johnson and Ali's careers, I elected to leave Louis out of this analysis. Louis was the antithesis of Johnson and Ali and despite the overwhelming negative political, social and economic climate for blacks during his reign, white reaction to him was more favorable and less adversarial than that of Johnson and Ali. In contrast to Johnson and Ali, Louis epitomized white society's image of an ideal black athlete as he allowed white America to "co-opt" him, thereby making him less threatening to the status quo. "Whites wanted to be assured that he wasn't a threat, and Joe Louis did that very well" (Hauser, 1991, p. 296). Publicly, he was an unassuming, God-fearing, mother-loving, Bible-reading black man. The press presented him as a model citizen who was white in every way except his skin color. Louis, in his desire to accommodate white America, went against black consensus when he entered a segregated Army, allowing the government to use him to boost black troop morale during World War II (Hauser, 1991). Finally, when America needed someone to disprove Hitler's doctrine of Aryan supremacy, Louis fought and defeated Max Schmeling, Hitler's symbol of Aryan supremacy (Hauser, 1991; Sammons, 1988).

In effect, the white establishment was able to co-opt Louis in ways that were never effective with Johnson and Ali in their prime. As a result, white reaction to Louis, though racist, was almost never hostile or retaliatory. Indeed, as Arthur Ashe observed, "Joe was the first black American of any discipline or endeavor to enjoy the overwhelming good feeling, sometimes bordering on idolatry, of all Americans regardless of color" (Hauser, 1991, p. 204).

The heavyweight division of boxing, unlike other divisions, such as the middleweight, featherweight, and super middleweight divisions, is the most dominant division in all of boxing. For the first one hundred years of boxing the heavyweight division was segregated and blacks were strictly prohibited from contending for the heavyweight title. Since prizefighting has been historically defined as a true test of skill, courage, intelligence, and manhood, the heavyweight division has traditionally stood as a symbol of racial dominance (Graves, 2001, Sammons, 1988; Spivey, 1985). Therefore, black challengers to white champions were perceived as a major threat to white national superiority (Sammons, 1988). In fact, until Joe Louis, most white Americans looked upon the prospect of a black titleholder as an intrusion of a despised group into an exalted realm of American masculinity and sport (Spivey, 1985).

The significance of interracial bouts between Johnson and his white opponents during the first half of the twentieth century involved much more than boxing talent and technique. According to Hietala (2002) in his book *The Fight of The Century: Jack Johnson, Joe Louis, and the Struggle for Racial Equality*,

> The ring became a national (and sometimes international) stage, and the dramatic confrontation between the two protagonists sometimes provoked a curiosity and reaction reminiscent of a crucial election, a major battle, or a natural disaster. The stark competition between black and white moved interracial boxing from the realm of sports into the arena of cultures, races, ideologies, and nations in conflict (2002, p. 10).

More than any other sport, boxing in the first half of the twentieth century provoked the deepest white anxiety about black manhood and black equality. Replete with social and cultural symbolism, the heavyweight division assumed a heightened racial aura until the advent of Muhammad Ali (Gates & West, 2000). Fortunately for Ali, Joe Louis and other black fighters paved the way for the eventual acceptance of blacks in the heavyweight division. In fact, when Ali arrived on the boxing scene, black Americans dominated the heavyweight division. In contrast to years prior to and following Johnson's reign, the heavyweight division had become (and still is), the place where black heroes meet for battle either with each other, or with the occasional representative of the white majority (Marqusee, 1999).

Chapters 3 and 4 provide an analysis of white reaction to Johnson and Ali using psychological mechanisms from Chapter 2 to frame this analysis. Through the analysis of white reaction to Johnson and Ali, the psychological investment white racists had in both the maintenance and perpetuation of white racial superiority – and the advantages associated with white domination and black subordination are illustrated in this chapter.

Chapter 5 is devoted to a discussion of the implications of this study for the discourse on white racism as well as social justice theory and practice. Additionally, as noted later in this chapter, this study is not without limitations. In fact, this inquiry has numerous limitations that I consider worthy of further research. Therefore, I propose several suggestions for future research and content development.

## Limitations of This Study

Though there are numerous limitations to this dissertation, the overall objective, which is to illuminate the psychodynamics of white racism, is not compromised. Having said this, there are at least three fundamental limitations of this study. First, because both the subjects for the two case studies and the historical periods were carefully selected, this study does not establish whether or not the psychological mechanisms used here are equally valuable for other case studies and other historical periods.

Second, in this dissertation, I deliberately selected some of the more extreme racist behaviors and white reactions, which I consider pathological. The question of whether this analysis would be illuminated for more implicit and less dramatic examples of white racism is yet to be determined.

Finally, because this kind of study is not well theorized in the literature on race, formulating a theoretical framework posed a considerable challenge. Therefore, the selected set of psychological mechanisms included in this dissertation does not follow a particular psychological orientation, such as psychoanalysis or cognitive-behavioral theory.

# CHAPTER 2

# PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS OF WHITE RACISM: A PSYCHO-HISTORICAL APPROACH

## Introduction

Presently, the majority of literature on white racism is disproportionately centered on blacks as victims of this manifestation of oppression. For instance, much has been written and published about the impact of bigotry and racism on the psychology of the black American. Through published articles, print media, television and scholarly texts, academicians, sociologist, and political scientists and have all attempted to gain knowledge of white racism through the study of blacks and the black community. The outcome of these research efforts provides more than enough insight regarding how white racism functions to disadvantage blacks on the individual, cultural and institutional levels. However, because the focal point of the research literature is on blacks and their community, the opportunity to study the perpetrators of the problem has been overlooked.

While the most contemporary research on white racism centers around its impact on blacks and black culture, some efforts have studied white racism as it relates to black pathology. The primary objective of these studies is to illuminate the myriad of social problems attributed to blacks, in particular, urban blacks, without fully acknowledging the link between these social problems, and white racial oppression. In other words, white racism is incorporated into these analyses peripherally, which de-emphasizes its role as the primary cause of many of these social problems. Therefore, social problems such as high incarceration rates, particularly among black males, gang related violence, black on black crime, drug abuse, and "the angry black man/woman syndrome," to name a few,

are often considered examples of black self-sabotage rather than the manifestations of the cultural and institutional white racism.

In recent decades, there has been even less focus on whites as the perpetrators of racism. Literature that explores whites as racist perpetrators often illuminates either the various kinds of social, political and economic advantages whites are accorded due to white privilege (Lipsitz, 1998; Rasmussen, 2001; Thandeka, 2000), or the social construction of whiteness as a privileged identity (Hale, 1998; Ignatiev, 1995; Roediger, 1998; Winant, 1994). Albeit important to deconstruct the material and economic benefits whites enjoy resulting from white skin privilege, the exploration of white skin privilege in and of itself is inadequate in terms of addressing comprehensively, the thoughts and behaviors of the perpetrators of white racism.

In particular, the study of whiteness does not articulate a theory or perspective that describes the collective white psyche for whom political, economic and social survival within a white dominated society is predicated on fundamentally racist attitudes and behaviors (Lipsitz, 1998; Smith, 1963; Thandeka, 2000). In other words, the underlying psychological components of white racism, such as guilt, shame and fear are often under-emphasized or omitted entirely in the discourse on white racism. In this dissertation I intend to posit a perspective of white racism that examines not the victims of white racism, but the inventors and perpetrators of this social ill. While I agree the study of whiteness is important and has its place in the discourse on race, I do not intend to explore the social construction of white identity and the material benefits this identity affords whites. Instead, I wish to concentrate my efforts on illuminating the psychological dimensions of white racial discrimination and bigotry.

According to Swartz and Disch (1970) in *White Racism: Its History, Pathology and Practice*, white society in acting on racist attitudes and beliefs, has driven itself into a moral desert. This moral desert is populated by distortions and pathologies that are the products of what the disease of white racism has made of the racist society (Schwartz & Disch, 1970). This argument is pivotal to the primary objective of this dissertation, which is the exploration of various psychological mechanisms of white racial bigotry. It is my contention that white racism produces personal and collective emotions, such as anxiety and guilt, that are unconsciously rooted in the psyche of white racists. These emotions, which will be described and discussed later in this chapter, are historical and deeply entrenched in the dynamics of discrimination and racial oppression.

As I have outlined in Chapter 1, my approach to providing an analysis of the psychology of white racism draws on a psycho-historical framework using both the Progressive and Civil Rights eras as historical context for this framework. In examining these two eras, I will provide a racial context for the case studies of Jack Johnson and Muhammad Ali. Additionally, I will extract from these historical periods evidence of a psychological dimension of white racism by devoting attention to various themes within each historical period that illustrates this dimension. For example, for the Progressive era, I will illuminate spectacle lynching and Jim Crow segregation.

This method of examining historical events to develop a psychological explanation for white racism is not an original technique. In his essay "Twentieth-Century Fiction and Black Mask of Humanity" in *Shadow and Act*, Ralph Ellison's (1953) critique of twentieth century white literary fiction utilizes a psychological framework to analyze the function of black characters in white literature. In his essay,

Ellison makes several important observations relevant to my assertions in this dissertation. Namely, he argues that racist portrayals of blacks in twentieth century literature are not merely based on misinformation; rather, these depictions are projected aspects of the internal psychological state of the writer, not the subject. He found that blacks in twentieth century fiction were so consistently false to human life that it led him to question what the black characters truly represent in the inner world of the white American.

Similarly, in this dissertation, I explore white reaction to the changing status of blacks to better understand the psychological dimensions of white racism. Using a psychological framework to examine white racism enables me to explore the inner world of white racists during the Progressive and Civil Rights eras.

Ellison's (1953) literary criticism in the aforementioned essay is not the only critique of white literary racism using a psychological framework. Toni Morrison (1992) in her book *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* offers a similar critique. In her quest to better understand the motivations of white writers who employ black representation as literary subject, she arrived at a conclusion that also supports my argument regarding the link between white psychology and white racism. That is, through examining the imagination of white writers and the depiction of blacks in their literature, the focus of racial discourse is on the writer and not the character. In other words, white literary imagination should be central to racial discourse and not the product of white imagination, the black characters. As Morrison notes,

> The scholarship that looks into the minds, imagination, and behavior of slaves is valuable. But equally valuable is a serious intellectual effort to see what racial ideology does the mind, imagination, and behavior of the masters (p. 11-12).

Further she observes,

> As a writer reading, I came to realize the obvious: the subject of the dream is the dreamer. The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation of the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious. It is astonishing revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity (p. 17).

Likewise, in this study, I posit that the subject of racism is the racist. And through a psychological analysis of white racism, I will provide evidence that white racism has a psychological dimension characterized by fear, anxiety, and guilt, to name a few emotions. With this in mind, I begin by examining the Progressive era.

## Progressive Era: The Failures of Reconstruction Revisited

Any discussion about the Progressive era should be preceded by some mention of Reconstruction, in particular, the systematic dismantling of the limited success of Reconstruction for blacks. In other words, outlining the historical continuity between the end of Reconstruction and the Progressive era is pivotal to fully comprehending the racial and sociological landscape of the Progressive era. The Progressive era, (1895-1920) came on the heels of twelve years of unprecedented social, political, and constitutional changes that characterized southern Reconstruction (1865-1877). Without going into great detail, the focus here is to link the eventual downfall of Reconstruction with the social, political, and racial context of the Progressive era. In short, the primary goal of Reconstruction was to establish full freedom for emancipated blacks including the right to vote for black men and participation as political officials in the southern political system (Wakely, 1994). However, the average white southerner fearful of black freedom was also resistant to black enfranchisement. In response, considerable efforts were made to subjugate blacks, limiting their economic and physical freedom. These attempts were mainly legal measures adopted state by state and generally served to control every aspect of black life.

As a result, brutal violence, sometimes resulting in death, and intimidation, was employed against blacks who violated these legal measures.

Against the backdrop of massive white fear, resistance and uncertainty, blacks were constitutionally enfranchised with the adoption of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the U. S. Constitution into law in 1868 and 1870 respectively (Wakely, 1994). These amendments, along with the Civil Rights Act of 1886 and 1875 legally protected blacks from acts of state sanctioned discrimination that previously deprived blacks of their civil rights (Wakely, 1994). Almost immediately following the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, whites reacted negatively and violently to these historic laws. Through violence and intimidation perpetrated by white terrorist organizations, such as the Ku Klux Klan (thousands of blacks were killed, brutalized, and terrorized) along with political maneuvering by southern politicians, white dominance was reestablished in the 1870s and 1880s; resulting in de jure segregation in schools, libraries, streetcars, railroads, bathrooms, and even drinking fountains. De facto segregation was a constant reminder of the inferior status whites considered appropriate for blacks, paving the way for Jim Crow legislation which gained prominence in the Progressive era (Diner, 1998).

## Progressive Era: Historical Overview

The Progressive era was characterized by a series of movements, each aimed in one way or another at renovating or restoring and reforming American society, its values and its institutions (Wakely, 1994). The urge for reform was mainly in response to the downsides of the unprecedented productivity and technology resulting from industrialization mainly in the north; namely, labors strife, abuse of corporate power, rapidly growing cities, and political corruption. The old social order was shaken by

massive influxes of immigrants, poverty, disease and crime associated with urban over population and economic competition (Wakely, 1994). In their attempt to address these growing social problems, reformers organized their thinking and actions around three basic goals: to end the abuse of power; to supplant corrupt power with reformed versions of such traditional institutions as schools, charities, medical clinics, and the family; and finally, to apply scientific principles and efficient management to economic, social and political institutions (Wakely, 1994).

No one political, social or economic movement dominated the Progressive era. Organizations and individuals who accepted the progressive theme or principle goals, sought to make changes on all levels of society. The upper; middle-and poor-working-class reformers all agitated for reform, as did women, religious progressives and politicians in all levels of government. By 1920, many new organizations and professional associations had been founded, including the American Bar Association, the National American Women Suffrage Association and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and four important constitutional amendments were ratified, including the Nineteenth Amendment which gave women the right to vote in federal elections. Additionally, public concern over poverty and injustice had risen to new heights and the progressives had established the principle of government intervention to ensure fairness, health and safety for most citizens (Wakely, 1994).

**Progressive Racism**

With all the successes of the Progressive movement, the era was also characterized by failure and contradiction, particularly with respect to black Americans. While the progressive challenge to entrenched ideas and customs gave impetus to black struggle for their rights, it posed a dilemma as well (Wakely, 1994). Progressive

reformers, including politicians on every level of government, did not have the black American in mind in regards to fairness, equality, justice and health and safety. Progressive in the true sense of the word did not mean forward progress for blacks. On the contrary, progressive reform sought to uphold pre-Reconstruction attitudes and the ideology of white superiority and black inferiority. In fact, for the vast majority of black Americans, the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century seemed in many respects the worst of times since Emancipation (Diner, 1998). For southern blacks, the overwhelming majority remained tied to the white man's land, trapped in agricultural peonage and subjected to Jim Crow laws, which had multiplied in the 1880s and 1890s (Wakely, 1994). Under the dictates of Jim Crow segregation, southern blacks were denied all rights afforded to their white counterpart – and were officially segregated from whites in almost all aspects life. Along with Jim Crow segregation, southern blacks were constantly terrorized by white violence and intimidation most notably, lynch mobs and vigilante groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (more on Jim Crow and lynchings later in this chapter).

During this era, the predicament of northern blacks was less bleak, but equally unpromising. The vast majority of northern blacks migrated from the south beginning in the 1880s, accelerating their rate of departure at the turn of the century (Wakely, 1994). This departure is commonly known as the Great Migration and is characterized by the mass exodus of southern blacks northward in pursuit of economic, social and political opportunities in the urban north. Having escaped the progressive racism of the south, many northern blacks found relative improvements over their existence in the south. In particular, industrial work, though menial and low wage, was in some respects, a more

hopeful economic prospect for blacks than the absolute degradation of rural sharecropping. In addition to earning a relatively higher wage, blacks in the north could vote, send their children to better schools, and sit wherever they pleased on the streetcars (Diner, 1998). However, these minor upgrades were not enough to completely differentiate the experience of northern blacks from that of southern blacks. Social and economic oppression was also a reality for northern blacks, prohibiting blacks from pursuing equality, social justice and political representation. Job discrimination, inferior schools, and segregated neighborhoods greeted newly migrated blacks. Racial tensions increased as the black population of many northern cities more than doubled in a few years (Klarman, 2004). For example, "massive outbreaks of white-on-black violence erupted in east St. Louis in 1917 and Chicago in 1919, killing an estimate forty-eight and thirty-eight people respectively, most of them black" (Klarman, 2004, pg. 64). As many as 20 northern cities experienced race riots in 1919, as working class whites resolved to take "drastic action" against the "growing menance" posed by the recent influx of southern blacks (Klarman, 2004).

Black disfranchisement was also a pivotal issue during the Progressive era, particularly in the south. By the 1890s attempts by blacks to vote were countered by voter restrictions, such as literacy tests, poll taxes, the grandfather clause and the white primary (only whites could vote in the Democratic Party primary contests) (Davis, 2004a; Wormer, 2003). These restrictions, though not in violation of the Fifteenth Amendment, systematically and completely disfranchised blacks. Such restrictions did not violate the Fifteenth Amendment because they applied to all voters regardless of race – however, these restrictions were more strictly enforced on blacks even when lower-class whites

were equally illiterate or unable to pay the poll taxes. To protect illiterate whites from disfranchisement, a range of loopholes were created to ensure their participation at the polls. One example of a loophole was the widely used "understanding clause," which allowed illiterate, white votes to register if they understood specific texts in the state constitution the satisfaction of white registrars (Davis, 2004b).

**Progressive Era: Psychological Analysis**

On the whole, Progressive racism demeaned blacks in the north and south, depriving them of constitutional rights afforded by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. During this era, white violence toward blacks was unprecedented, unregulated and savage in nature. With the establishment of Jim Crow laws in 1883, de facto segregation was quickly replaced by constitutional and legal segregation. These laws legally sanctioned white supremacy and further solidified black dehumanization and second class citizenship. Black resistance to these laws resulted in violence, intimidation and brutal death. Spectacle lynchings, a mostly southern phenomenon proliferated during this era, especially after 1882. According to Leon Litwack in his introduction of *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, "in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, two to three black southerners were hanged, burned at the stake, or quietly murdered every week" (Litwack, 2000, p. 12).

Both Jim Crow segregation and spectacle lynchings embodied post-Civil War white racial attitudes and behaviors toward black freedom, epitomizing white racial pathology. Lynching, anti-black rioting and the rise of white terrorists organization, fueled this atmosphere of racist hysteria, which was in part created by black enfranchisement and congressional protection against discrimination during Reconstruction. In the following section of this dissertation, I will examine in greater

detail, the psychological dimensions of Jim Crow segregation and spectacle lynching. Through this examination my goal is to provide evidence that white reaction to black freedom and enfranchisement throughout the Progressive era was intrinsically psychological in nature.

## Jim Crow Segregation: White Fear of the Enfranchised Black

Jim Crow segregation is based on a complex system of racial laws and customs, primarily enforced in the south that enabled white social, legal and political domination of blacks. Essentially, blacks were segregated, deprived of the right to vote, and subjugated to verbal abuse, discrimination and violence without redress in the courts or support by the white community (Wormer, 2003). By the early 1900s, Jim Crow was a far-reaching institution that affected every aspect of American life (Davis, 2004a; Williams, 1987). All over the south, (and the north to a lesser degree), cities, towns, and states passed statues and ordinances that legitimized the Jim Crow way of life. In short, there were Jim Crow restaurants, Jim Crow schools, Jim Crow hospitals, Jim Crow water fountains, and Jim Crow customs for blacks (Williams, 1987). According to some historians including Davis (2004a), the term Jim Crow is believed to have originated around 1830 when a white minstrel entertainer danced a jig while singing the lyrics to the song, "Jump Jim Crow," popularizing the song (Davis, 2004b). The history of this song and the minstrel caricature are not important to this study – what is important is that the term Jim Crow became a commonly used racial slur synonymous with black, colored, or Negro in the lexicon of many whites; and by the end of the nineteenth century acts of racial discrimination towards blacks were often referred to as Jim Crow laws and practices (Davis, 2004a; Williams, 1987).

The legacy of Jim Crow segregation began long before the United States Supreme Court officially struck down the foundations of post-Civil War Reconstruction in 1883 declaring the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional (Wormer, 2003; Woodard, 1966). According to Woodard, evidence of segregation was widespread in the south after the Civil War and during Reconstruction. Black Codes, adopted by many states in an effort to segregate the races and limit the economic and physical freedom of the formerly enslaved (Davis, 2004c; Franklin, 1967; Woodard, 1966). Black Codes were also laws established to appease white fear and anxiety concerning the perceived possibility of black insurrection and revenge. Under these codes, black were limited to where they could rent or purchase property, were forced to work against their will, could not quit a job without being arrested and imprisoned for breach of contract to name a few (Conrad, 1966; Franklin 1967). While these legal attempts at white imposed segregation were short-lived, they functioned to reestablish white control and to create physical and psychological distance between blacks and whites.

Jim Crow segregation, supported and sanctioned by vigilante and mob violence, systematically gained momentum throughout Reconstruction and the years leading up to its climax: the 1883 Supreme Court's decision to declare the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional (Wormer, 2003). This act prohibited segregation in public facilities such as streetcars, hotels, theaters, schools, and parks. In addition, the Supreme Court ruled that while the Fourteenth Amendment prohibited state governments from discriminating against people because of race, it did not restrict private organizations or individuals from discriminating against people based on race (Woodard, 1966; Wormer, 2003). In 1896, the Supreme Court also validated state legislation that discriminated against blacks when

it legitimized the principle of "separate but equal" in the Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) ruling. In this ruling the Supreme Court declared that separate accommodations for blacks did not deprive them of equal rights if the accommodations were equal (Williams, 1987; Woodard, 1966; Wormer, 2003). These Supreme Court decisions not only strengthened and upheld already existing Jim Crow laws, it supported the proliferation of new laws, state and local, well into the late 1960s.

To amplify the magnitude and insanity of Jim Crow segregation I would like to provide a few statistics complied by Susan Falck (2004) for the website, Jim Crow Legislation Overview. In her research on segregation laws passed in the United States between 1865 and 1967, she found that more than 400 state laws, constitutional amendments and city ordinances legalizing segregation and discrimination were passed during this time. Of the total number of laws passed the South outpaced the rest of the country possessing 342 laws or 78% of the total number of laws passed. Miscegenation statutes, intended to prevent interracial marriage, led the list of Jim Crow laws enacted. Of the more than 400 state laws nationally, at least 127 were laws prohibiting racial intermarriage and cohabitation. These anti-miscegenation laws were passed between 1865 and 1950.

**Jim Crow Segregation: Psychological Analysis**

White obsession with black freedom and enfranchisement as discussed in the previous sections was a reflection of a post-Civil War paradigm shift where social implications of emancipation for blacks threatened all aspects of white supremacy. Although blacks were routinely prevented from voting and exercising civil rights extended by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, these constitutional laws granted first-class citizenship to a population white society could no longer treat as property to be

bought, sold and owned. This paradigm shift caused great consternation to white progressives who, against the backdrop of progressive reform, refused to recognize blacks as first-class citizens. The perception that black enfranchisement would lead to black upward mobility was threatening to white supremacy and the ideals of the southern way of life. White fear and anxiety concerning the loss of power associated with slavery and second class citizenship was manifested in Jim Crow segregation and the 400 state laws, constitutional amendments and city ordinances legalizing segregation. Anti-miscegenation laws in particular, were ultimate segregation laws. "They clearly announced that blacks were so inferior to whites that any mixing of the two threatened the very survival of the superior white race" (Davis, 2004c). Anti-miscegenation ideology was linked to the myth of the black male rapist and lynchings, both mechanisms used by dominant whites to exact brutal violence and death on blacks who had challenged or unintentionally violated the prevailing norms of white supremacy (Litwack, 2000).

Jim Crow segregation was a legalized outlet for whites to systematically disfranchise blacks and relegate them to a world of poverty and degradation. Psychologically, Jim Crow not only appeased white anxiety and fears concerning black involvement in the political and economic system, it also served to justify expressions of white terror, including race riots, ritualized lynching and other forms of violence. Insecurities and uncertainty about what to do with the formerly enslaved black was a lingering post-Civil War question facing both the north and south throughout the Progressive era. Black resistance to Jim Crow segregation, including the efforts of W.E.B. DuBois and the NAACP further provoked white control and black segregation.

As black resistance and challenge to Jim Crow increased, so too did ritualized white mob violence and terror.

In the next section, I will discuss the psychological dimensions of spectacle lynchings, inarguably one of the bleakest expressions of racial dehumanization in the history of the United States since slavery (Litwack in Allen, 2003). Lynching, much like the other forms of ritualized violence meted against blacks during the Progressive era, was a physical and psychological mechanism designed to underscore the limits of black freedom and control and maintain black subordination in every aspect of life (Litwack, 2000).

## Spectacle Lynching: An Overview

Spectacle lynching, ultimately the primal expression of deeply rooted hate and fear of black political and social progress, transformed ordinary white men and women into mindless murderers and sadistic tortures (Litwack, 2000). In the 1890s, lynchings in general claimed an average of 139 lives each year, 75% of them black. The total number of lynchings declined in the following decades but the percentage of black victims rose to 90%. Between 1882 and 1968, and estimated of 4,742 blacks met their deaths at the hand of lynch mobs (Litwack in Allen, 2000). Many of these lynchings were spectacle lynchings. Spectacle lynchings involved unimaginable brutality, burning, and separation of body parts including male genitals, fingers and ears. They were public rituals that were attended by thousands of southern whites. It is important to note that by the 1890s, lynching and sadistic torture were exclusively public rituals of the south as the north largely ignored these southern atrocities (Litwack, 2000).

As the late nineteenth century turn toward mob violence makes clear, the transformation from slavery to freedom was characterized by a re-articulation of cultural

hierarchies in which terrorism provided the means for defining and securing the continuity of white supremacy. Therefore, the rise of black lynching in the years following the Civil War and Reconstruction is an indication of a broader American attitude toward black entrance into the political order (Wiegman, 1995). Lynching in this context was symbolic of white denial of the black male's newly articulated right to citizenship and with it, the various privileges of patriarchal power that have historically accompanied such signification within the public sphere (Wiegman, 1995). Not surprisingly, lynch mobs often selected black people who were educated and successful, those in positions of leadership, those determined to improve themselves, those who owned farms and stores and those suspected of having saved their earnings – that is, men and women perceived by whites as having stepped out of their proscribed place (Litwack in Allen, 2000).

In addition to targeting successful blacks and blacks perceived as "trying to be white," the standard white justification of lynching was that it punished the heinous crime of black rape of white women (Beaderman, 1995). While this was the primary reason given to the public, this oft repeated justification was untrue on two accounts. Not only was there no postwar wave of sexual assaults but also rape was rarely recorded when justifying specific lynchings (Hodes, 1997). Southern lynching then, is much more an expression of southern fear of black progress than of crime against white women (Litwack, 2000). To reinforce this perception (as well as to display white supremacy), both mainstream and alternative newspapers regularly ran stories that announced and documented the scenes of violence, often offering graphic detail and practices of torture through which the entire black southern population could be defined and policed as

innately, if no longer legally, inferior (Wiegman, 1995). These newspaper accounts also emphasized this false connection between black male lynchings and rape of white women and fueled the perception of the dangerous black man (Hodes, 1997).

The ritual of spectacle lynching was such a physical display of white pathology that a full description is warranted. The following description captures not only the insanity of lynchings but also the production created to establish an atmosphere of terrorism intended to maintain the racial hierarchy that emancipation and Reconstruction had begun to destroy (Hodes, 1997),

> Lynching differed from Klan assaults in that the perpetrators were largely undisguised and the murder was open to the public. When a black man was lynched for the alleged rape of a white woman, the execution was likely to be carried out by mass mob. Vivid descriptions were frequently printed in the national press. In a composite portrait of the most gruesome (though not atypical) such lynching, the appointed victim might be a neighbor or a stranger; the charge might be suspected or wholly fabricated. Capture might involve white people taking the man forcibly from the street, his workplace, or his home. If a man was already under arrest, it meant taking him forcibly from the local jail with little or no objection from the white jailer or sheriff. White people of all classes came from miles away to participate in the spectacle, sometimes with their children and picnic supplies in tow. (Notices might be printed in local papers, railroad companies might add extra cars or run special trains, and children might be given the day off from school to attend.) The crowd could be composed of hundreds or thousands, including local officers of the law. The method of murder might include mutilation, castration, skinning, roasting, burning, hanging, and shooting. Afterward the audience might gather souvenirs, including rope, ashes, buttons, toes, fingers, ears, teeth, and bones. Shopkeepers might display small body parts in their windows, and photographers might sell pictures postcards of the event (p. 176).

This description of lynching represents the brutal underside of modern southern society that made the culture of segregation work and even seem sane to whites (Hale, 1998). Spectacle lynchings in particular, functioned by ritualistically and symbolically uniting white southerners by embodying the white community in action. Thus the entire white population could share in the act of lynching blacks, making it a communal

activity. This kind of communal expression was evident in the naming of lynchings after cities and towns and the white communities that performed them (Allen, 2000; Hale, 1998).

## Spectacle Lynching: Black Hypermasculinity

The contestation of bodies, the mutilation and killing of the black man's body in return for the violated one of the white woman, was the underlying theme of many spectacle lynchings (Hale, 1998). The accusation of black male rape of white women was relatively rare before blacks were enfranchised, an observation made by many including Ida B. Wells and Frederick Douglass (Hodes, 1997). Douglas remarked, "It is only since the Negro has become a citizen and a voter that this charge has been made" (Hodes, 1997, p. 206). As documented by scholars including Hodes (1997), Hale (1998), and Litwack (2000), the twin themes of rape and lynching were accompanied by the perception that black men's political power was equated with sexual transgression across the color line.

Indeed, "the fear of the black rapist exploded not in the 1870's when black men were recently released from the reportedly 'civilizing influence of slavery,' but in the 1890's as whites began building segregation as culture upon segregation as policy" (Hale, 1998, p. 233). Before emancipation, white reaction to sexual liaisons between white women and black men was more tolerable, for under slavery such liaisons did not threaten the social and political hierarchy (Hodes, 1997). This changed after emancipation when the subjugation of blacks was no longer legal and blacks were entitled to some of the same rights as whites. The unsubstantiated belief that black men were prone to raping white women became widespread, making the protection of white women seem like a plausible justification for lynching. To white men, sexual liaisons

between black men and white women put black men and white men on too-equal footing, illuminating the fact that white men could not always control white women; and blurring the lines of racial categories so crucial to maintaining the racial hierarchy previously sustained in slavery (Hodes, 1997). Although the rape of white women was rarely the primary reason for lynchings, it deterred black men and white women from forming sexual liaisons and relieved white men of their fears of sexual competition with black men (Hale, 1998). The end of racial slavery and the emergence of Reconstruction gave black men freedom to pursue sexual relations with white women. This dynamic not only threatened the ideology of white supremacy, it developed into a perception on the part of white men that black men were competing with them for white women. This sense of sexual competition was key to the development of the myth of black male hypersexuality as will be discussed later in this study.

**Spectacle Lynching: Psychological Analysis**

In the Foreword of *Without Sanctuary* Congressman John Lewis queries, "What is it in the human psyche that would drive a person to commit such acts of violence against their fellow citizens?" (Lewis, 2000). This question is important and central to the premise of this dissertation and provides evidence of a psychological dimension of white racism. In particular, the function and manner of spectacle lynching were inherently psychological in nature, symbolizing what is considered in the psychological community as "acting out" behavior – behaviors that are symbolic of deeper psychological meaning. Spectacle lynching, then, was more than the simple fact of a black man or woman hanged by the neck (Litwack , 2000). It was the "acting out" of white male obsession with the enfranchised black male. Through the slow, methodical, sadistic, often highly inventive forms of torture and mutilation, white southern men "acted out" and projected their

unconscious sexual insecurities, fears and anxieties on the black body (Litwack, 2000). The performance of this ritualized form of sadistic torture allowed white men to symbolically conquer and control, at least temporarily, their fear of black sexuality and sexual competition for white women – while appeasing their own feelings of sexual insecurity.

This notion of sexual anxiety and concern for masculine supremacy was explicit in the ritual dismemberment of the black penis either before or after death, and its subsequent display as a souvenir in a shop window. This grotesque display of black emasculation reveals the sexual undercurrent of lynching and the underlying ambivalence white males displayed toward black male sexuality. In *Exorcising Blackness* (1984) Harris makes this point clearly:

> For white males there is a symbolic transfer of sexual power at the point of the executions. The black man is stripped of his prowess, but the very act of stripping brings symbolic power to the white man. His actions suggest that, subconsciously, he craves the very thing he is forced to destroy. Yet he destroys it as an indication of the political (sexual) power he has (p. 22).

In other words, white sexual anxiety and fears betrays a simultaneous desire for and disavowal of the black male's phallic inscription (Wiegman, 1995). Additionally, this act of dismemberment enabled a perverse level of physical intimacy between the white male aggressors and the black body, the subject of both his admiration and his fear (Wiegman, 1995). Spectacle lynching, then, was the site of psychosexual re-enactment where white men through brutal and sadistic mutilation and castration of the black body, were able to project many of their fears and insecurities regarding their own sexual prowess vis-à-vis the black man.

Lynchings in general, and spectacle lynchings in particular, were the embodiment of white southern obsession with blacks, demonstrating profoundly psychological

function. In the name of racial supremacy and white power, open-air spectacles that drew large crowds including women and children were created and produced as a form of southern entertainment. Spectacle lynchings were carefully choreographed, advertised, photographed and written about in local newspapers and other publications. In addition to emasculating lynch victims, other body parts, including teeth, ears, toes, fingers, nails, bits of charred skin and bones were severed and distributed as favors and souvenirs to participants and the crowd. Such human trophies were often displayed in a conspicuous location for public viewing (Litwack, 2000). Photographs of lynched victims were used to make postcards to be purchased and mailed to relatives and friends. In *Without Sanctuary* (Allen, 2000), approximately 100 original postcards are displayed – most of which include the lynch mob and the crowd, both with looks of self-satisfaction regarding the hanging body above them.

Having outlined the racial and historical context of Jack Johnson's career, and the psycho-historical analysis of white racism, I will now turn my attention to establishing the racial and historical context for Muhammad Ali's career, the Civil Rights Movement. As with the Progressive era, this discussion of the Civil Rights Movement is psycho-historical, focusing on white reaction to the changing status of blacks to provide evidence of a psychological dimension of white racism.

**Civil Rights Movement 1954-1968: An Overview**

As with all historical movements, the impetus for the Civil Rights Movement commenced decades before its culmination in the mid 1960's. The modern Civil Rights Movement represents a peak in the overall struggle for black liberation that began when the first Africans were brought to North America (Blumberg, 1984). While recounting the historical significance of every protest, sit-in, boycott, and march is critical to fully

comprehending the magnitude of black resistance in the 1960s, this study will highlight some, but not all, key events during this era. Led by activists Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., Ella Baker, Bayard Rustin, Ralph Abernathy, A. Philip Randolph, Ralph Bunche, Daisy Bates and Rosa Parks, to name a few, the Civil Rights Movement signified continued refusal by blacks to accept forced segregation and subordination (Blumberg, 1984).

Similar to earlier black protest movements, the overall objective of the Civil Rights Movement was to liberate blacks from white oppression through nonviolent protest and agitation. Within this framework, leaders of the Movement sought to dismantle white oppression through forced integration, and equal participation of black people in American institutions (Blumberg, 1984). Along with the demand for full integration, blacks demanded freedom from harassment, terror and violence; the right to vote; quality education; the right to earn a living wage; the right to fair housing and to equal participation in the political system, to name a few (Bennett, 1964; Blumberg, 1984; Lomax, 1964). Black impatience and frustration with white racism and its various manifestations peaked after the Second World War when, despite their gallant efforts to dismantle Hitler and Nazi Germany, black soldiers returned home from Europe and immediately encountered increased violence and racial hatred. Ironically, the United States and the Roosevelt administration waged war on Hitler along with other ally countries because of Hitler's barbaric racist and anti-Semitic treatment of German Jews, leading to over six million deaths, and widespread violence against other "marginalized" Germans and others throughout his reign.

While it was easy for white Americans to point out the gross injustice of Hitler's ideology and subsequent actions, few white Americans were willing to recognize and speak out against the duplicity and hypocrisy inherent in American political rhetoric at the time. During the war, blacks had not only successfully challenged discrimination in the military, they also made a tremendous impact on the outcome of the war. Sympathetic to the Jews and other Germans targeted by Hitler's terror, blacks were hopeful that the outcome of the war coupled with their participation in it, would soften their second-class status in the states (Franklin, 1967). Disillusioned with the lack of jobs and ample opportunity to cash in on wartime heroism, many black soldiers openly lamented their dilemma suggesting that something be done about their condition. Blacks in general, began to awaken to the reality that change was not likely to occur through patriotic efforts such as participation in the Second World War.

**Black Resistance: Montgomery Bus Boycott and School Desegregation**

On December 1, 1955, in the midst of a deepening mood of despair and disillusionment that gripped blacks after World War II, Mrs. Rosa Parks boarded a bus in Montgomery, Alabama and said "no" to the bus driver's demand that she get up and let a white man have her seat (Lomax, 1971). In response to her opposition, and her disregard for Jim Crow regulations, Parks was arrested and jailed, sparking widespread outrage and immediate black resistance. What developed out of this situation proved to explode a level of black frustration that had been percolating for many years. Black Americans, heeding the words and spirit of Frederick Douglass, had decided to take collective action. The following day, citizens of Montgomery, angered by Parks arrest and decades of intimidation, harassment and discrimination, convened and begin planning what came to be known as the Montgomery bus boycott.

Proclaimed by Martin Luther King as one of the greatest movements in the history of the nation, the boycott, considered the first major event of the modern Civil Rights Movement, was sustained for an entire year. On the backs of dignified black citizens of Montgomery, King transformed a spontaneous racial protest into an awesome massive resistance movement with a respected method and a nonviolent ideology; considered at the time, a "revolutionary point of departure" (Blumberg, 1984, p. 22). More importantly, the boycott garnered national attention and helped set the tone for the entire Civil Rights Movement. It also brought together laborers, college professors and doctors, which gave the movement legitimacy for blacks (Bennett 1964).

White reaction to the boycott was immediate and bitter. Motivated by racist emotions, white gangs and city police began terrorizing blacks as they car pooled and walked to and from work. King's house was bombed and he and other leaders were jailed on various trumped-up charges. The bus boycott signaled the end of reliance on litigation as the major strategy of civil rights activists and immediately accelerated the use of nonviolent direct action to test and supplement the laws. It also demonstrated the ability of black leaders to mobilize all segments of the community – the elite and the masses – through their churches, organizations and communication structure, and to gain moral and financial support from sympathizers throughout the country (Blumberg, 1984). Inspired by blacks in Montgomery, blacks in other southern cities who had been experiencing racial discrimination and white violence, awakened to the need for social protest. They, along with King and clergymen across the south, formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), making integration of public transportation their prime target (Lomax, 1971).

By the 1960 bus boycotts and attempts to integrate public schools had flourished all over the country. In September 1957, President Eisenhower ordered federal troops to the all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas to prevent interference with school desegregation. Due to the intensity of white resistance to school integration, days after their arrival, troops had to escorted nine black students into the high school. The troops remain in Arkansas until the end of the school year to protect the blacks students from mob violence and other forms of white racial hatred. Black demand for change was at an all-time high. White resistance to these demands increased. Every attempt to integrate public schools and public transportation was met with immediate retaliation. As in the past, black progress was viewed as an assault on the goals of white supremacy. As articulated by Blumberg (1984), the semblance of black people getting ahead "too fast" threatens the racial privileges of some whites. In response, whites would commit acts of violence including lynchings, bombing churches and homes, killing assertive blacks and prominent black leaders, to name a few reactions. In the Deep South, especially, whites appeared willing to go to great lengths to employ violence to suppress black advance.

In 1962 and 1963 the Civil Rights Movement reached a new level of intensity with widespread protests and demonstrations capturing the public's attention. Along with the continuation of sit-ins and other forms of protest seeking the end of segregation, Freedom Rides and James Meredith's attempt to integrate University of Mississippi dominated these two years (Bennett, 1964). Freedom buses were routinely bombed and riders were beaten by angry mobs wielding chains, sticks, and iron rods, and other violent weapons. Klan activities increased as Klan members often awaited the arrival of Freedom Riders at bus terminals and other places where they thought the buses might arrive.

Indeed, white backlash and violence toward Freedom Riders was repeated many times in 1962. The federal government was slow to respond, intervening only when mob rule took over and international pressure mounted to force the government's hand (Blumberg, 1984).

The incidents of southern violence against black people pursuing their constitutional rights seemed endless (Blumberg, 1984). When James Meredith, a black native of Mississippi sought to enroll in the University of Mississippi in September 1962, he was steadfastly prevented from enrolling by Governor Ross Barnett. Despite numerous attempts by the university administration to reach a compromise with Barnett with the sole purpose of avoiding a violent confrontation, the governor refused to change his position. Finally, due to significant pressure from blacks and white liberals across the country, President Kennedy was forced to make an intervention. He decided to send federal marshals and federalize the Mississippi National Guard (Blumberg, 1984). White reaction to Kennedy's decision was swift and predictably violent.

**March on Washington and Birmingham: Resistance Intensifies**

> It was the year of funerals and a year of births, a year of ending and a year of beginnings, a year of hate and a year of love. It was a year of water hoses and high-powered rifles, of struggle in the streets and screams in the night, of homemade bombs and gasoline torches, of snarling dogs and widows in black. It was a year of passion, a year of despair and a year of desperate hope. It was 1963, the one-hundredth year of Negro emancipation and year one of the Negro Revolution. In this year, which marked a fundamental forking with a nonviolent spasm against the unyielding walls of the caste cage. They surged through the streets in black waves of indignation. They faced snarling police dogs and armored police tanks. They were clubbed, bombed, slashed, murdered (Bennett, 1964, p. 327-328).

The March on Washington, the brutal assassinations of Medgar Evers and President John F. Kennedy, the death of four black girls and the injuring of many others in the bombing of Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, and the battle in

Birmingham dominated the headlines in 1963 (Blumberg, 1984). Clearly, the level of retaliatory violence and destruction targeted toward blacks and white supporters of civil rights was an indication that change was indeed taking place, albeit very slowly. This was no more evident than in Birmingham, Alabama where in Bennett's words, "the dawning realization that this was the bitter fruit of one hundred years of patience" (Bennett, 1964, p. 329). One hundred years after slaves were freed from bondage, Blacks had become increasingly frustrated and weary with white politicians that proposed token change when real change was clearly necessary.

Resistance, rebellion and discontent had reached epidemic proportions in many black communities in the north and south, especially in the Deep South. At the height of this discontent, Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth invited Martin Luther King, Jr. and the SCLC to Birmingham to address the issue of segregation and social injustice. King arrived in Birmingham on Wednesday, April 3, 1963 with a clearly stated goal. As he stepped from the airliner he announced that he would lead racial demonstrations in the streets of Birmingham until "Pharaoh lets God's people go" (Bennett, 1964, p. 330). It was King's belief that "if Birmingham could be cracked, the direction of the entire nonviolent movement in the south could take a significant turn. It was our faith that 'as Birmingham goes, so goes the south'" (Bennett, 1964, p. 330).

Symbolizing a nation at war with inevitable change, the events in Birmingham were a significant turning point in American race relations for two important reasons. First, it revealed the sheer "ugliness" of the southern way of life. Eugene "Bull" Connor, Chief of Police in Birmingham, an extreme segregationist, symbolized the intense resistance to black social equality whites embodied during the 1960's. The violence and

brutality meted on blacks and white sympathizers was perhaps unprecedented at the time, but was certainly not an aberration. In fact, Birmingham was nicknamed non-affectionately as "Bombingham," by local blacks, and was known to be a stronghold for Klan activity. Second, Birmingham's reputation for being the most segregated place in the south gave black people confidence that if integration could be achieved in Birmingham, it could be achieved anywhere. Birmingham exposed the vulnerability of the South's political regime, and black southerners wisely seized the opportunity to attack it. In many cities, under the relentless pressure of demonstrations, white business owners and politicians sat down to negotiate (Fairclough, 2001).

The weeks and months after the events in Birmingham saw an explosion of black protest on a scale never seen before across the south and in northern cities. Blacks poured into the streets, boldly asserting their rights to use "white only" parks, playgrounds, beaches, libraries, theaters, restaurants and hotels (Fairclough, 2001). "They boycotted and sat-in. Above all, they marched to the twin bastions of white power that graced the center of every southern town, the courthouse and the city hall, in challenges to white domination that were both symbolic and physically real" (p. 274).

**Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Freedom Summer**

On July 2, 1964, two days before Independence Day, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the historic Civil Rights Act during a ceremony at the White House. Introduced in 1963 by President John F. Kennedy, the Civil Rights Act was highly controversial; advocates were unable to secure passage in Congress until 1964. Often referred to as the most important United States law on civil rights since Reconstruction, it was the most far-reaching and comprehensive law in support of racial equality ever enacted by Congress. It gave the US Attorney General additional power to protect all

citizens against discrimination and segregation in voting, education and the use of public facilities (Franklin, 1967).

The passage of this law was in no way a gesture of benevolent political offering. To the contrary, its passage followed one of the longest debates in senate history. More importantly, it is worthy to point to the massive civil rights struggles in Mississippi and Alabama, as well as in other southern regions that helped paved the way for the inevitable passage of this legislation. Perhaps the most obvious link between the passage of the Civil Rights Act and social unrest was Freedom Summer.

Before getting to the impact of Freedom Summer on the history of American race relations, let us explore the immediate white reaction to the passage of the Civil Rights Act. According to Franklin (1967), while there was a notable decline in discrimination in some fields, the period following the passage of the Civil Rights Act was marked by strong resistance to its enforcement, and considerable violence manifested in some places in the North where some northern whites discovered for the first time their racism and resentment toward blacks for agitating for change (Franklin, 1967). In the south, on the other hand, whites reacted to the passage of the Civil Rights Act with a mixture of habitual backlash such the refusal to honor and respect the new law; and extraordinary acts, such as the closing of public schools in parts of Maryland and Virginia rather than desegregating (Ogletree, 2004).

Perhaps the most surprising and unexpected events following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was the violence that reached an unprecedented peak of fury, dwarfing by comparison the summers of 1962 and 1963. Often referred to as "The Red Summer," Bennett (1964) describes the summer of 1964 as follows,

> In the summer of 1964, a barrage of events beat like a fusillade on the American mind. A small army of nonviolent demonstrators invaded the South and fought bitterly contested battles in the Black Belt Counties of Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana. There were riots and miniature civil wars on the streets of scores of cities in the North. All over the America, during this troubled and chaotic summer and fall, men were in motion, singing, screaming, fighting, swept along by the dancing waves of passion and despair (p. 355).

The summer of 1964 had witnessed the peak of the nonviolent movement, with the nation's attention focused on the Mississippi or Freedom Summer, the disappearance and deaths of three civil rights workers, Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman, riots in Harlem and Rochester, New York, and of course, the eventual passage of the Civil Rights Act.

The sit-ins, boycotts and Freedom Rides, though met with resistance, had been highly successful in the Upper South. In contrast, these forms of protests and demonstrations were met with considerable resistance in the Deep South, especially the state of Mississippi (Blumberg, 1984). For example, when Medgar Evers, a Mississippi native and World War II veteran attempted to register to vote in his hometown of Decatur in 1946, he was greeted by a mob of whites brandishing guns. He later said, "We fought during the war for America, Mississippi included. Now, after the Germans and Japanese hadn't killed us, it looked as though the white Mississippians would" (Levy, 1998, p. 55). Nearly a decade later, in August 1955, Emmett Till, a 14 year old black youth from Chicago was brutally beaten, shot and thrown in the Tallahatchie River by two white men for allegedly whistling at a white woman (Levy, 1998). With white hostility and uncensored racism the rule of the day, Robert Moses of SNCC, and the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), the umbrella organization that coordinated the activities of SNNC, the NAACP, and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), mounted a major campaign in Mississippi during the summer of 1964 aimed at black voter

registration (Levy, 1988). This campaign, widely known as Freedom Summer, solicited the support of college students from all over the country both black and white. Philosophically, it was widely believed that black enfranchisement would be significant historically, symbolically, and psychologically (Blumberg, 1984). The main impetus, however, was to register blacks to vote, exercising political power that would mitigate years of oppression and under-representation. As history has documented, for black people in Mississippi, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 changed little, and it would be decades before blacks would begin to benefit significantly from exercising the right to vote (Fairclough, 2001).

The efforts to register black voters in Mississippi and other southern towns proved to be a precarious endeavor. In the early 1960s, Mississippi had a dreadful record of black voting rights violations. For example, "In order to be certified to register, a Mississippi citizen had to be ready to interpret any section of the state constitution – the correctness of which would be decided by the same voting registrar who presented the passage" (Blumberg, 1984, p. 88). Despite these restrictions, blacks wanted to vote. Since the gradual disenfranchisement of blacks after the end of Reconstruction, the struggle for the right to vote has been on the agenda of black leaders and other community and political activists. Many blacks who were courageous enough to challenge the system and stand in line for hours to register were summarily turned away either by violence and intimidation or unrealistic requirements for registration. In the early stages of the voter's registration campaign, Robert Moses started the practice of civil rights activists accompanying local blacks to the designated place to share with them the long wait in line to register, which almost always ended in disappointment. He and other members of

SNCC would return to the scene time after time after being harassed, hit or arrested (Blumberg, 1984).

"Freedom summer stood as a crucial moment in the history of the nation, it had a deep impact on the civil rights movement and on other aspects of American life" (Levy, 1998, p.72). However, nationwide, integration, which in practice often translated into token desegregation of all-white institutions, came under increasing attack. The level of overall violence and intimidation including the sheer number of deaths, beatings and threats received that summer, compounded by years of repression and oppression, mocked the fundamental principles of nonviolence and convinced SNCC and CORE activists to reevaluate and adopt new tactics (Levy, 1998). Despite the passage of two civil rights bills, the more militant civil rights leaders felt betrayed by the Democratic Party's moderation on various issues, including the right to vote. For example, according to Fairclough (2001) the fundamental weakness of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was not only its failure to guarantee that most basic of rights, the right to vote, but it also failed to protect black people from white racist violence. Overall, the Civil Rights Movement and the legislation that came out during its ascendancy, made the nation more aware of the persistence of poverty among large segments of the black American population, rooted, according to many, in the history of racism and race relations in the United States. While it did not solve the problem, the Civil Rights Movement deserves credit for bringing this aspect of the American experience to the fore (Levy, 1998).

On the other hand, white violence perpetrated on blacks continued to escalate across the country. In August 1965 a major civil disturbance took place in the Watts area of Los Angeles that would attract the attention of many militant black leaders. Some

historians, including Blumberg (1984), viewed this disturbance as a decisive turning point in both the way blacks responded to urban oppression and the tactics engaged to promote change. Blumberg wrote,

> Riots in Rochester and Harlem in the summer of 1964 had preceded Watts but the devastation of four days of burning and looting which left thirty-four people dead most of them black, was a sharp indicator that protest was entering another stage (p. 22).

In Franklin's (1967) account of the upheaval in Watts, the immediate cause of the unrest was the arrest of a young black who was charged with reckless driving. When a white policeman drew a gun, an angry crowd assembled and began to fight the police. The following day, after an unsuccessful attempt to quiet the tensions, the rioting was resumed, accompanied by looting and burning. By the time the police, assisted by the California National Guard restored peace, the toll had reached 34 dead, 1,032 injured, and 3,952 arrested. Property damage alone was estimated at 40 million. The underlying causes of this riot and other urban rebellions were plentiful and are well documented. Blumberg (1984) summarized, "This series of urban rebellions, more popularly referred to as riots were a response to racial oppression that ran parallel to and interacted with nonviolent civil rights campaigns and black power activity" (p. 139). Similarly, "the riots displayed the rage of millions of black Americans for whom the early civil rights movement had little effect, except perhaps, to raise their expectations." And, this rage, he claimed, "sprouted from a society pervaded by a racial, social, and economic inequality, which itself was the by-product of centuries of racism" (Levy, 1998, p. 29).

As outlined by Blumberg (1984), many nation-shaking events occurred in the momentous years of 1964 to 1968, which ushered in a new and radical form of black protest. These events included, a series of major urban disorders, or riots that left many

black communities looking like war zones; the growth of other significant social movements, many of them inspired by the vanguard efforts of the many civil rights activists, and finally, and probably the most important, the escalating, undeclared war in Vietnam and the massive anti-war movement that eventually embroiled the country. This new form of black protest was influenced by both the success of the Civil Rights Movement and other black liberation movements.

In summary, the Black Power Movement emerged from several convergent factors, including general frustration with the pace of black empowerment during the Civil Rights Movement, a new interest in racial consciousness, and a new generation of radical black leaders who rejected King's formula for black progress. Fueled by the explosive and sometimes controversial rhetoric of Malcolm X after his conversion to the Nation of Islam, the Black Power Movement was dominated primarily by two major organizations, the Nation of Islam and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. Both organizations espoused Black Nationalism, an ideology that advocates black separatism or the rejection of everything white. The Nation of Islam, or Black Muslims as they were commonly called, combined a strong psychological message with practical and successful economic development ventures. Emphasizing pride in blackness, this urban-based organization stressed the type of puritanical and capitalist virtues that had enabled white Americans to succeed – stable marriage, fidelity, abstinence from alcohol and drugs, and good work ethics, to name a few. Known for their successful work with ex-criminals and drug addicts, Black Muslims were equally notorious for their so-called racist belief that whites were "blue-eyed devils," to be avoided (Chehade, 2001). This kind of rhetoric, along with a decisive critique of American hypocrisy, provoked intense

white backlash. For example, for many years the Nation of Islam was under FBI surveillance (Chehade, 2001). Black Muslims also refused to work within the dominant white American framework to improve the conditions for blacks (Lomax, 1971). This rejection of white America's solution for black improvement angered many, including white politicians, the media and white liberal integrationist.

**Psychological Analysis of Civil Rights Era**

As with the Progressive era, white reaction to black political and social advances was also central to the Civil Rights era. Destructive behaviors, such as lynchings, beatings, cross burnings, church bombings, violence and intimidation meted against school children, are just a sampling of the many violent mechanisms whites employed to prevent blacks from gaining social and racial equality in the South. These behaviors, which manifested from fear, loss of social and economic power, guilt, projection, all psychological mechanisms, functioned to maintain and protect white racial supremacy and black second-class citizenship. This was no more evident than in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957 when President Dwight Eisenhower ordered the Arkansas National Guard to Central High School to protect black children from angry mobs one day after the school was finally desegregated. These troops patrolled the school for the rest of the year; in response, Little Rock officials closed all schools in Little Rock in 1958 and 1959 rather than desegregate them (Wakely, 1994).

The gruesome murder of Emmett Till and the deaths of numerous known and unknown civil rights workers, and the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. provide additional evidence that psychological factors such as fear, hatred, revenge, uncertainty and anger contributed to displays of white racism and bigotry during the Civil Rights era. So, too, did the violence that erupted in the summer of 1963, the one-

hundredth year of emancipation (Bennett, 1964). Among other important events, 1963 was the year of the anti-segregation campaign in Birmingham, the bombing of a Birmingham church that killed four young girls, and the assassination of Medgar Evers and President John F. Kennedy. The widespread violence and intimidation that characterized the Civil Rights era has psychological implications. As articulated in the premise of this study, these psychological implications are pivotal to better understanding the psychodynamics of white racism, in particular, white reaction to the changing status of blacks in American society.

## Psychological Mechanisms: An Introduction

Now that I have established the psychological framework for this study, I would like to turn my attention to defining the psychological mechanisms used to analyze white reaction to Jack Johnson and Muhammad Ali. These mechanisms represent a handful of the many mechanisms underlying the psychology dimension of white racial oppression. In terms of how I came to select the mechanisms included in this dissertation, in part, they were selected from the psycho historical analysis of American history from slavery to the Civil Rights era.

### Projection

For the purpose of this dissertation, projection is defined as "ascribing of characteristics of the self, including thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and traits, to other people" (Levitt, 1980). Problems and issues that we are unwilling to address or manage internally are thereby projected onto to others. Therefore, the primary function of projection is to shift responsibility from an individual or a group of people to make others appear responsible for their problems. For example, white racists ascribe to people of color

behaviors, thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and sentiments that they have about themselves, but which they find unacceptable.

## Scapegoating

Scapegoating, similar to projection, is destructive and counterproductive and allows whites to escape racial responsibility (Chehade, 2001). According to Perera (1986) in *The Scapegoat Complex: Toward a Mythology of Shadow and Guilt*, scapegoating involves finding the one or ones who can be identified with evil or wrongdoing, blamed for it, and cast out from the community in order to leave the remaining members with feelings of guiltlessness, atoned with the collective standards of behavior. "It both allocates blame and serves to inoculate against future misery and failure by evicting the presumed cause of misfortune" (Perera, 1986, p. 9). Scapegoating involves the total isolation and ostracizing of the rejected person or group of people (Perera, 1986). With regards to this definition, whites often employ scapegoating to avoid confronting racial attitudes and behaviors that conflict with both democracy and Christianity. As mentioned previously in this chapter, when whites deny collective responsibility for the various social and economic consequences of racism, blacks are blamed. This act of racial scapegoating absolves white accountability and creates a situation where blacks are both victimized and liable.

## Anxiety and Fear

For the purpose of this study, anxiety is not limited to the conventional definition of anxiety, which is characterized by general psychological uneasiness caused by fear. Instead, in this study, anxiety is characterized by a psychological madness that deprives one of reason resulting in irrational thinking and behavior (Schwartz & Disch, 1970). This kind of anxiety is entirely "disproportionate to the objective danger" and it

diminishes an objective awareness of the situation, as the situation in fact exists. Its chief social manifestations have been the most extreme kind of antisocial behavior imaginable in modern civilization (Schwartz and Disch, 1970, p. 154). Fear, an emotion often used interchangeably with anxiety, is historically considered one of the primary emotions (along with joy and anger), and is the emotion of avoidance of a consciously recognized, usually external, eminent danger (Kazdin, 2000). Some social scientists argue that the interchangeable use of fear and anxiety is inappropriate. On the other hand, others are adamant that because both emotions represent a state of arousal that results when an individual recognizes a lack of power or capability to handle some threatening situation, these emotions can be used interchangeably (Corsini, 1994). In this dissertation I will use both terms interchangeably, recognizing the difficulty in accurately distinguishing between fear and anxiety. However, fear will generally correspond to real life danger, such as fear of slave uprisings and fear of black retaliation post-slavery. Anxiety, which can be rooted in guilt, stereotypes and perceived threats to one's identity, will generally correspond to the perception of, or vague feelings of uneasiness (Corsini, 1994).

"Lack of predictability regarding when aversive events occur leads to chronic anxiety because the individual remains constantly vigilant and does not relax" (Ramachandran, 1994a, p. 153). This component of anxiety aptly describes the mental state of many white southerners following black emancipation. Not only did the end of institutional slavery signal the end of white control of the black body, it was the beginning of black freedom to participate in the democratic process as it was at that time. Relegated to slave labor for over 300 years, newly freed blacks were theoretically permitted to benefit from the many advantages afforded to free citizens in a democratic

society. Education, employment, ownership of land, and political involvement are just a sample of institutions freed blacks were eager to partake in.

Referring to emancipation, Franklin writes, "In short period of our history has the whole fabric of American life been altered so drastically as during the Civil War and the period immediately following it" (Franklin, 1967, p. 297). The economic changes that stemmed from the emancipation of 4 million slaves resulted in feelings of uncertainty and panic in many southern whites. In addition to the economic dilemma resulting from the lost of slave labor, the consequences of black freedom created both internal and external chaos for the greater part of the white South (Franklin, 1967). While the majority of freed slaves were at least spiritually and psychologically prepared for freedom, most whites in the South regarded the change in blacks' status with fear and apprehension. Further, white awareness of the various economic and social opportunities possible for freed blacks created an atmosphere of competition and anxiety. White fear of black competition for jobs and social upward mobility was both pervasive and realistic in this time of uncertainty and change. Given these points, white anxiety, with feelings of distress, aggression and avoidance behaviors were rampant in the antebellum South. The outcome of emancipation created an identity crisis for many whites whose livelihood depended so heavily on the presence of slaves and complete control of the black body. The loss of identity and personal value associated with the end of slavery, compounded by uncertainty concerning their future, provoked whites to engage in a new and different form of racism -- a kind of racism that was characterized by severe violence and intimidation, and a preoccupation with law and order (see Chapter 2). This change in racial dynamics was precipitated by anxiety, fear and the inability to predict the future.

## Anxiety and Black Economic Upward Mobility

Since the era of slavery, white supremacist ideology has dictated the limits for black economic and social development. Within the social construction of white supremacy, blacks are not expected to be self-sufficient, entrepreneurial, and independent of white control and domination. When blacks are successful in a social environment where the rules of engagement are designed to encourage and support white achievement while simultaneously rewarding discriminatory practices that prevent black prosperity, whites almost always respond with violence, intimidation and other tactics aimed at limiting resources, power and opportunity (Lipsitz, 1998). This kind of overt racist anxiety is precisely what happened to a prosperous black community in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1921.

In the case of the white riots in Tulsa in 1921, black economic prosperity triggered what is perhaps one of the worst examples of mass racial violence in American history, excluding slavery. Before the 31st of May 1921, the black business district known as Greenwood had flourished despite segregation and white racism. Also known as the "Black Wall Street," Greenwood showcased several restaurants, theaters, retail shops and hotels. By most standards of economic achievement, Greenwood was a thriving powerhouse on par with Harlem in New York City as a center of urban black life and culture. For blacks, Greenwood was the kind of business district many black communities across America aspired to emulate at the time. Blacks had no need to cross over to the white side of town to spend their money. This, resulted in white envy and added to racial tensions between blacks and whites in Tulsa.

Anxiety and resentment being the collective white responses to the "Black Wall Street," on the one hand, and black political and economic independence from whites on

the other, was the context for 1921 Tulsa and the racial explosion that was inevitable. When Sarah Page, a 17 year-old white elevator operator alleged that Dick Rowland, a 19 year-old black man attacked her, the already strained racial relationship between black and white Tulsans, coupled with the heightened white fear associated with black entrepreneurial success, resulted in the infamous Tulsa, Oklahoma Race Riots. White residents, especially white business owners, bitterly resented the prosperity of the Greenwood district. There was widespread sentiment that members of the supposedly "inferior race" were exceedingly presumptuous in achieving greater economic prosperity than members of the so-called superior race (Madigan, 2001). Fortified with this sentiment and the allegations by Page, armed white men, some of them deputized by the police, systematically burned and destroyed the entire black community. At the end of a three-day massacre, 36 square blocks were burned to the ground and more than 3,000 homes destroyed. As many as 300 black people were killed, many of whom were buried in mass graves or simply dumped anonymously into the Arkansas River (Madigan, 2001). By the end of the onslaught, Tulsa's thriving black community, which had numbered some 15,000, was completely destroyed.

Clearly Page's allegation was an opportunity for racist whites to retaliate against and literally destroy a prosperous black community. White anxiety, which had reached pathological proportions, provoked whites to annihilate a community that was destined to become the model for black communities across the country. Greenwood awakened white Tulsans to the reality that blacks were indeed capable of building and maintaining an economic and cultural network in spite of white racial discrimination and intimidation. Greenwood also symbolized a threat to white control, white dominance and black

dependency on the white power structure. For blacks, the alleged assault of Sarah Page by Dick Rowland was more significant than an act of white scapegoating. Indeed, although there was no evidence that Rowland assaulted Page, the burning of Greenwood was a harsh reminder to blacks, especially black men, that white women were (and still are), the forbidden fruit.

## Guilt

Guilt, sometimes classified as a moral emotion, has co-existed with white racism dating back to the late 1600s when whites made a conscious decision that human slavery would be based on skin color (Ebony, 1966). Guilt, as defined by the *Encyclopedia of Human Behavior* is a feeling of remorse for violating a moral rule (Corsini, 1994). It is a feeling that results from a wrongful deed, a self-condemnation for what one has done (Thandeka, 2000).

Guilt then, amplifies an evaluation that the self is responsible for violating a moral rule. Therefore, with respect to white racism, another definition is necessary to consider:

> Guilt is the primary human motivator that prevents, inhibits, avoids, escapes, modifies, amends, or defends against possible or actual immoral fantasies or conduct. "Guilt" refers primarily to the affective-cognitive report of anticipatory, coincident, or consequent moral remorse and secondarily to the motivation disposition to minimize guilt (Ramachandron, 1994, p. 467).

Feelings of guilt can arise in response to a broad range of failures, transgressions, and social blunders (Kazdin, 2000). "When people feel guilt, they feel bad about a specific behavior – about something they've done" (Kazdin, 2000, p. 40). Shame, though not a primary psychological concept to be discussed here, is related to guilt and is often linked as an intersecting phenomenological experience. Therefore, to fully appreciate the comprehensive nature of guilt as a reaction to racial challenges, it is important to note that shame is a complementary and intersecting component of guilt. In other words,

people who feel guilt for committing a socially undesirable behavior, often report feeling shame (Kazdin, 2000).

In his book *The Content of Our Character*, Shelby Steele (1990) gives the example of guilt as it relates to the development and legacy of white privilege. According to Steele, white guilt in its broad sense springs from a knowledge of ill-gotten advantage. More precisely, he writes, "it comes from the juxtaposition of this knowledge with the inevitable gratitude one feels for being white rather than black in America. Given the moral instincts of human beings, it is all but impossible to enjoy an ill-gotten advantage, much less to feel at least secretly grateful for it, without consciously or unconscious experiencing guilt" (p. 80, 81). Steele goes on to state,

> White Americans know that their historical advantage comes from the subjugation of an entire people. So, even for whites today for whom racism is anathema, there is no escape from the knowledge that makes for guilt. Racial guilt simply accompanies the condition of being white in America. I do not believe that this guilt is a crushing anguish for most whites, but I do believe it constitutes an ongoing racial vulnerability, an openness to racial culpability, that is a thread in white life, sometimes felt, sometimes not, but ever present as a potential feeling (p. 81).

Continuing with Steele's analysis, the conscious knowledge of ill-gotten advantage is powerful. In particular, what makes such knowledge powerful is the element of fear that white guilt always carries. According to Steele, because white guilt is generated from the conscious knowledge of ill-gotten advantage over blacks and other people of color, whites often fear what this ill-gotten advantage says about them. In other words, white guilt makes whites anxious that this ill-gotten advantage will be exposed, revealing the mythology of white superiority (Steele, 1990). In this sense, the fear that accompanies white guilt becomes the central issue and not the problem that caused the guilt (ill-gotten advantage). "But," as Steele notes, "this fear for the self not only inspires

selfishness; it also becomes a pressure to escape the guilt-inducting situation" (p. 85). Ultimately, the fearful underside of white guilt creates economic and social anxiety.

The admission of white guilt by whites in effect, leads to a loss of white power and control. The recognition that white privilege and white racial advantage comes from the subjugation of an entire people reflects a weakness in the ideology of white superiority – that is, the lie that white people are inherently or biologically superior to blacks. It also creates a shift, or as Steele notes, a "remarkable loss of white authority and what whites loose in authority, blacks gain. You cannot feel guilty toward anyone without giving away power to them" (Steele, 1990, p. 78). The conscious knowledge of ill-gotten advantage along with the knowledge that white supremacy is a socially constructed fiction escapes most white people. Unfortunately, it is precisely this lack of awareness that perpetuates white racism.

In the early 1960s with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the dynamics of white guilt and the loss of white authority were evident. The 1964 Civil Rights Act, which outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, not only in public accommodations but also in employment, effectively acknowledged and illuminated white society's injustice toward mostly non-white people. Prior to the passage of this law, lawmakers, feeling the heat from the black liberation movement and the recent death of John F. Kennedy, were forced to wrestle with the consequences of not supporting this important legislation. The loss of white power to discriminate based on color and the admission of white racial injustice (guilt) are both examples of Steele's (1990) notion of how white guilt leading to the loss of white power. Steele wrote,

> Had white society not been wrong there would have been no need for such an act. In passing this act, the nation acknowledged its fallen state, its lack of racial innocence, and confronted the incriminating self-knowledge that it had rationalized flagrant injustice (Steele, 1990, p. 79).

In passing the 1964 Civil Rights Act white lawmakers symbolically atoned for past transgressions against blacks in particular, elevating their legal status from second-class citizenship.

In the court of white public opinion, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was met with stiff resistance and rebellion on the part of white Americans, especially in the South. White groups opposed to integration responded to the Act with significant backlash ranging from protests, increased support for pro-segregation candidates for public office racial violence (Klinkner, 1995) Why the backlash? Because this law acknowledged that blacks had been systematically relegated to second class citizenship via legal and non-legal racial oppression. The passage of this act also signaled an acknowledgement by the government that blacks were considered second-class citizens not because they were racially inferior, but rather, they were prevented from obtaining first-class status by personal and institutional racism. Therefore, this Act effectively exposed the fact that historically, whites had reaped the benefits of an unequal democracy that handed them privilege and advantage while simultaneously making blacks ineligible for the same benefits. This awareness forced white citizens to acknowledge their ill-gotten advantages, however the vast majority of them were not in favor of protecting blacks, paving the way for equal opportunity in employment and other aspects of social and political involvement. Instead, white violence towards blacks increased in response to the loss of white authority typically associated with the acknowledgement of guilt (Steele, 1990).

In theory, when whites become aware that they are benefactors of ill-gotten advantage, the emergence of guilt associated with this awareness is inevitable. However, in the case of white reaction to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, in a twisted dynamic of psychological irrationality, the presence of guilt actually increased the desire for whites to maintain ill-gotten advantages despite the passage of the act. In other words, the knowledge of ill-gotten advantage forced whites to grapple with the reality that black inferiority was a myth, and that blacks were capable of obtaining similar status if given an equal opportunity. Rather than honestly confront this recognition, historically whites have chosen to justify white lies even in the face of truth. Given this as a context, after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, growing white resistance to racial equality was evident in what was dubbed "Bloody Sunday" after state troopers severely beat civil rights demonstrators as they attempted to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama on March 7, 1965 (Fairclough, 2001). When given the opportunity to become antiracist, many whites opted to recommit themselves to racism, choosing instead to continue reaping the benefits of white privilege and all the assets associated with this advantage. So, instead of seeking to atone for ill-gotten advantages, many white Americans sought to escape the guilt-inducing situation through use of violence, force, and intimidation.

**Sexual Racism: The Psychodynamics of Guilt and Fear**

White male patriarchy in early southern society played a critical role in constructing the ideology of white womanhood – or as aptly put by Chehade (2001), the creation of white women as the forbidden fruit of Eden. The historical circumstances that led to this social construction can be found in the study of the myth of the black male rapist and the subsequent lynchings of black men.

Historically, the construction of southern white womanhood (myth of the white woman as sacred) is associated with white slaveholder's sexual transgressions against female slaves. Smith (1963) refers to these transgressions as "back-yard temptations," to describe the slaveholder's frequent trips to the slave quarters in his backyard. Here is an account of Smith's theory of these back-yard temptations and how they came to be linked to the construction of white womanhood (Smith, 1963). Slaveholders, the majority of them being Christian patriarchs, subscribed to puritan beliefs regarding sex and sexuality.

As a result, their expectations that their wives be frigid and moral in all manners related to intimacy and sex, precluded the possibility of mutual satisfaction (Smith, 1963). These men, lonely and frustrated by the state of affairs they had set up in their own homes and hearts, begin raping female slaves (who they considered without souls) to satisfy their sexual desires and fantasies (Smith, 1963). Because these slaveholders were Christian, they felt compelled to justify their sexual transgressions with female slaves by denying them their humanity, thus making them property to be manipulated and controlled, including sexually (Smith, 1963).

In a rather simplistic account, as the trips to the "back-yard" increased, so too, did the slaveholder's feelings of guilt, confusion and ambivalence. These sentiments did little to suppress his temptations, so he continued to rape female slaves, often fathering children he either sold on the auction block or retained as his own slaves. After a while, the light brown children in his backyard unveiled his dirty secret. His wife began to understand the purpose of his frequent trips to the "back-yard." Caught in a race-sex-sin spiral, the slaveholder needed something to quiet his guilt. The solution was the creation

of the myth of the sacred white woman – the notion that his wife, the white southern woman, was sacred and chaste (Smith, 1963).

The invention of the white southern woman as sacred enabled slaveholders across the South to justify their sin and the consequences of their sin. As Herton (1966) notes in *Sex and Racism in America*, the myth of the sacred white woman evolved out of a psychological desperation to preserve the deception of sexual transgressions. In other words, the southerner had to find or create a symbol, an idea of grace and purity that would transcend the magnitude of his "back-yard" behavior.

Certainly feelings of guilt played a critical role in the invention of the myth of the sacred white woman. However, it was the development of subsequent historical events that ultimately led to the construction of the sexualized black male. This development, though motivated by guilt was at long last due to the slaveholder's fear and suspicion regarding white women and black men. Namely, he feared and suspected his wife of the same sins he had committed so pleasantly and so often (Smith, 1963). His suspicions grew as he became more consumed by this psychological projection. "Of course, his suspicion was groundless," wrote Herton (1966). "It is virtually impossible for white women to 'slip around' with Negro men during slavery. But somehow, someway, the white man had to get rid of his feelings of guilt" (p. 97). Like any psychological burden, white southerner's self-made guilt was too all-consuming to internalize. Instead, to rid himself of his awful sins, he projected his transgressions onto the black male.

Therefore, the black male became the metaphorical depository in and through which both white women as well as white men could drain themselves of guilt, fear and inadequacy (Herton, 1966). The ultimate scapegoat for all white social and psychological

ills, the black male became the living embodiment of not only the white woman's unconscious sexuality, but of everything that was wrong with her life and her society (Herton, 1966). Slaveholders, on the other hand, created an image and an ideology of black male sexuality that ascribed distorted sexual virility unique to black men. And through the power of misinformation, white women were brainwashed to fear black men and view them as sexual predators. She was also conditioned to believe that black men where obsessed with her flesh and desired to rape her more than he desired to rape his own kind.

## Fear of Black Sexuality

White America's psychological obsession with black sexuality, in particular, black male sexuality, contributed immensely to the violence perpetrated on black men in the last decade of the 19th century. According to West (2001), there is a crucial link between black sexuality and black power in America. Black male sexuality is a form of black power over which whites have little control – yet its visible manifestations evoke the most visceral of white responses, namely, white fear. "This fear," wrote West "is rooted in visceral feelings about the black bodies fueled by sexual myths of black women and men" (p. 83). West continues by providing examples of some stereotypes created about blacks, mostly to validate and accommodate white self-created fear and anxiety,

> The dominant myths draw black women and men either as threatening creatures who have the underlings of a white culture. There is Jezebel (the seductive temptress), Sapphire (the evil, manipulative bitch), or Aunt Jemima (the sexless, long-suffering nurturer). There is a Bigger Thomas (the mad and mean predatory craver of white women), Jack Johnson, the super performer – be it in athletics, entertainment, or sex – who excels over others naturally and prefers women of a lighter hue), or Uncle Tom (the spineless, sexless – or is it impotent? – sidekick of whites) (p. 83).

Consistent with the legacy of slavery and the degradation of black bodies, sex and sexuality has remained a powerful weapon in oppressing blacks (Chehade, 2001; West, 2001). This history can be traced to slavery where slave masters routinely raped slave women and girls while at the same time, ignoring their wives' sexual needs. As she argues in her book, the use of sex to facilitate control and subjugation of black Americans is a sickness white people have to acknowledge as part of white identity,

> Sex has been a powerful weapon in oppressing blacks. Our long record of trying to control the bodies of black people is in itself perversely sexual. Our country has owned and exploited physical parts of the body to benefit white people's wishes, whims, and desires. The black body has been used as a laboriously, exploitatively, and sexually. We've taken pleasure in watching black pain. The very act of bondage is a form of sadistic control over another person, let alone an entire race. We did things to the black body that we would never do to ourselves. We captured, bound, whipped, chained, stripped, branded, displayed, sold, degraded, objectified, crudely fondled and enslaved (p. 144).

For whites to admit the adverse impact of the sex-race connection to their identity is to acknowledge a shameful and painful past. Further, it would require that the ideology of black sexuality, which is constructed as pathological in nature, be understood not as a biological fact, but as a social construction developed out of white fear and anxiety, and the threat of changes to the status of blacks both before and after emancipation. Whites would also need to know that much of the early obsession about black sexuality resulted in the development of myth and fantasies about blacks that were not only viewed as truth, but have also remained prevalent in white perceptions presently. The psychological fear and anxiety expressed by whites regarding black sexuality was and still is a basic ingredient of white racism (West, 2001). "Racism and sex share a long and disturbing history. To ignore the sexual content in racism would be naïve" (Chehade, 2001, p. 144).

The reprehensible history of white America vis-à-vis blacks provides insight into the particular ways in which interracial sex and relationships are viewed (Chehade, 2001;

Hodes, 1997). For instance, through the lenses of whites after slavery – white men in particular, black men were a representation of the "walking nightmare of the white supremacist's sense of moral inadequacy, an inadequacy which engulfs the whole life of the southerner, but which the white southerner projects entirely into the sexual area" (Herton, 1966, p. 100). This projection to the sexual area developed out of the lack of confidence white men had in their own sexual reputation when pitted against the alleged sexual virility of black men. From a psychological perspective, this lack of sexual confidence reinforced and justified white racial oppression. Additionally, this lack of sexual confidence, combined with the general apprehension whites felt toward emancipated blacks, is the basis for the kind of white male propaganda responsible for constructing the myth of the black male rapist (Chehade, 2001; Hodes, 1997).

Having established the theoretical framework for the psychological dimensions of white racism, the focus now is to discuss how these psychological elements are exhibited in white attitudes and behaviors. In the following chapter, I will probe the character of white thinking and action as it relates to the success of heavyweight prizefighters Jack Johnson and Muhammad Ali.

# CHAPTER 3

# ANALYSIS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS: WHITE REACTION TO JACK JOHNSON

More than any other sport, boxing provoked the deepest white anxiety about black manhood and black equality. Replete with social and cultural symbolism, the sport assumed a heightened racial aura throughout the twentieth century from Johnson's day to the advent of Muhammad Ali. Highly ritualized, as well as an often-sordid affair, boxing pits one man's wits and sheer strength against another's. Two muscled, almost naked men dance a grueling fight to "knockout," an end that symbolically and purposefully imitates a form of death. In the early part of the century, whites feared that blacks would interpret any victory of black boxers over white boxers in fair public bouts as a sign of their inherent equality with white America (Gates and West, 2000, p. 16).

## Introduction

The range of psychological reactions Jack Johnson and Muhammad Ali engendered in whites nearly defies explication. With Johnson in particular, all levels of governmental agencies, state, local, and federal, conspired against him to limit his influence on Progressive society (Gilmore, 1975). Johnson and Ali had little in common beyond their color and exceptional boxing skills. They faced similar obstacles because of their race, place and prominence, but responded to these obstacles and the racially proscriptive society in radically different ways (Hietala, 2002). Whites, too, reacted to Johnson and Ali in radically different ways. Throughout the careers of both prizefighters, white perceptions of their behavior both in and outside the ring were usually racialized and reflected white bigotry. For example, when training for the fight of the century, Johnson aroused the concern of many whites by virtue of his nonchalant, calm and

carefree demeanor. Johnson's carefree disposition was a technique employed to relax and diffuse pre-fight jitters. However, to some whites, his disposition meant something else entirely. One reporter explained Johnson's calmness in such manner, "Johnson essentially African, feels no deeper than the moment, sees no farther than his nose – which is flat and of the present … Incapable of anticipation … Johnson is safe in his soul shallowness and lack of imagination" (Gilmore, 1975, p. 37).

Obviously, this particular white interpretation of Johnson's behavior is racialized and based on stereotypes about blacks that were prevalent during the Progressive era. Both boxers, because whites perceived them as a threat to white racial supremacy, elicited deeply rooted hatred and bigotry. In this dissertation, these attitudes are regarded as the psychological dimensions of racism. To probe the character of white thinking and action, an analysis of the psychological dimensions of white racial prejudice and discrimination is necessary. In the following chapter, this dimension of white racism will be illuminated and discussed as evidence of white reaction to the professional and personal successes of both Jack Johnson and Muhammad Ali.

**Introduction to Jack Johnson, 1908-1915**

On December 26, 1908, a historic event took place in Sydney, Australia that would change forever the racial landscape of American society. Jack Arthur Johnson, black heavyweight boxer defeated Tommy Burns, an Australian, and marked the end of a long history of segregation in the heavyweight division of prizefighting. Johnson's bout with Burns ended many years of black exclusion from the highest and most honorable division of boxing. White titleholders had refused to fight black challengers until Burns agreed to fight Johnson. Compared to what unfolded after Johnson's later defeat of Jeff Jeffries, most white Americans paid little attention to the magnitude of this historic event

in far away Australia. In fact, some white reporters viewed Johnson's defeat of Burns as good for the sport of boxing only because they also believed Johnson's victory was temporary and his ultimate defeat would symbolically reaffirm white racial supremacy. Sport journalists and other writers who covered the fight, did so without the drama and media hype it may have warranted had the fight been staged on American soil. Not only did the fight take place on foreign soil, Johnson defeated a white Canadian, not a white American. Perhaps the most ominous aspect of this fight, however, was the manner in which Johnson conducted himself during the fight. As Sammons (1988) describes, with almost every punch, he delivered a taunt, a devastating combination designed to fluster and belittle his white opponent while elevating himself. If Johnson did not look upon the defeat of Burns as a "racial triumph," he certainly wanted to prove his own superiority as a man. In doing so, Johnson sought the greatest white prerogative – supremacy over all others – for himself (Sammons, 1988).

This display of power in the ring was undoubtedly not characteristic of black fighters at the time. White fighters like John L. Sullivan, Tom Sharkey, Robert Fitzsimmons, and Jim Jeffries, were known for and expected to display power and aggression in the ring. They attacked their opponents relentlessly and prided themselves on never taking a backward step. For them, the ring was their territory, and the objective was to hold it. Black fighters, on the other hand, were expected to view both the ring and the object of the fight differently. The ring, similar to the world, was assumed to be the white man's territory, and the black fighter's object was to yield it without suffering physical punishment. This tactic was usually accomplished through feints and deceptive defensive maneuvers. Black boxers waited for the white fighter to tire before moving on

the offensive without displaying significant aggression (Roberts, 1983). The significance of Johnson's approach against Burns was ostensibly a departure from the more submissive style of fighting. In contrast to black boxers during his time, he was more than willing to punish white fighters severely. This act alone was considered in violation of the unwritten code that black boxers were expected to obey (Roberts, 1983).

"In the year following the Burns victory, Johnson met and convincingly defeated on American soil, "white hopes," none of whom provided formidable opposition (Gilmore, 1975, p. 33). This margin of victory garnered public attention throughout the country, most notably by novelist and journalist Jack London, one of Johnson's staunches critics. At the end of an editorial piece in the "New York Herald", London attempted to persuade Jeff Jeffries, retired former heavyweight titleholder, to return to the ring to dethrone Johnson and return the title to the white race. He ended the piece with these words, "But one thing now remains. Jeff Jeffries must now emerge from his alfalfa farm and remove the golden smile from Jack Johnson's face. Jeff, it's up to you. The White Man must be rescued" (Roberts, 1975, p. 68). Though Jeffries deplored the idea of a black champion, he respectfully declined the invitation. Thus, began the search for the "great white hope," a term that "meant any white heavyweight who had not recently been knocked out by another white heavyweight and would be a contender for the heavyweight title" (Gilmore, 1975, p. 30).

The impetus for this movement was born of the belief that as novelist Rex Beach wrote, "The ignorant black man is no match for the educated white man" (Sugar, 1982, p. 71). The search for the "great white hope" as described by Gilmore, was "like the search for the origin of the Nile, full of false hopes, preposterous characters, tragic deaths, and

excessive newspaper coverage"(Roberts, 1975, p. 68). As the public came to know him, antipathy toward the black champion grew vicious in tone and content (Sammons, 1988). The Progressive Era society was not prepared to harbor a black champion among its elites. In fact Johnson's achievement came at a time when white repression of black citizens was at an all time high.

> During Johnson's reign, blacks experienced their worst treatment since the Civil War. After Reconstruction, which ended the year Johnson was born, court decisions, legislative and executive actions, informal arrangements, publicly and privately sanctioned terrorism, the "findings," of biologists and social scientists, and the metaphors of writers and movie makers denied blacks economic opportunities, separated them from whites in all but servile interactions, and stigmatized them as childlike brutes genetically incapable of participating in civilized society (Spivey, 1985, p. 147).

By 1909 the American public began to view Jack Johnson as a recalcitrant Negro. They saw the flashy clothes and his brightly colored, fast automobiles. They saw the way in which he challenged white authority in his numerous brushes with the law. They also heard of his nightlife and exaggerated tales of his sexual bouts. But perhaps most disturbing and further agitating to the status quo was his public appearances with white women (Roberts, 1983). Johnson's romantic life was the source of interest for both black and white Americans. However, his penchant for white women was viewed with greater disdain by white America, especially those who subscribed to the myth of black hypersexuality and the ideology of lynching. Because interracial sex was considered taboo and harmful to the racial status quo, Johnson's romantic associations with white women led directly to some of his most personal difficulties. As will be discussed later in this chapter, Johnson's refusal to date and marry his own kind led to two serious allegations – violation of the Mann Act and the charge of abduction.

Indisputably, Johnson's emergence and success in the heavyweight division provoked widespread anxiety and fear in white America. When Johnson returned to the U.S. as champion, he was full of confidence and was determined to live according to his own rules. As his smile suggested, his life was his own; he meant to enjoy it, and he did not care what anyone else thought (Roberts, 1983).

Meanwhile, Johnson consistently demolished every "white hope" opponent endorsed by the white establishment. He defeated Jack O'Brien, Frank Moran and Stanley Ketchel, to name a few. With every defeat, opposition toward him grew more vicious in both tone and content. White America, in particular, white boxing fans, became desperate, demanding through letter-writing campaigns and opinion pieces in various publications that Jefferies come out of retirement immediately. By the end of 1909 as the plea for Jeffries to fight Johnson again reached a feverish pitch, Jeffries reluctantly succumbed to the pressures of race and dollars. Hundreds of letters were sent to him from fans, former and current boxers, and sports journalists across the country with a single theme: it was incumbent upon him as a white man to shut Johnson's smiling mouth once and for all (Mead, 1986; Roberts, 1983). In accepting the public's invitation to fight Johnson, Jeffries maintained that he was responding to "that portion of the white race that has been looking to me to defend its athletes' superiority" (Sammons, 1988). He admitted that he was returning to the fight less for the heavyweight belt than to redeem the white race. "I am going into this fight," he claimed, "for the sole purpose of proving that a white man is better than a Negro" (Remnick, 1998, p. 222).

With the former champion's endorsement of a fight against Johnson confirmed, attention turned to the magnitude of the fight; and subsequent concern about what would happen to black-white relations if Johnson won.

> No advertising genius was needed to market the Johnson-Jeffries fight. The issues in this fight were literally black and white. Jeffries became the 'Hope of the White Race' and Johnson, the 'Negroes Deliverer.' Seen as a battle for racial superiority everything about the fight was treated as having momentous importance (Roberts, 1983, p. 91).

Because Johnson had proven himself convincingly against other worthy white prizefighters, some whites were concerned about the disturbing possibilities for Johnson and other blacks if he won. There were widespread predictions throughout the United States that if Johnson won, Negroes around the country and especially in the South would misinterpret the victory as more than physical equality with their white neighbors (Roberts, 1983). Southern congressmen against prizefighting were publicly vocal about their opposition to the fight, talking freely about the danger of the Negroes having their heads turned by a Johnson victory. One southern official, incensed by the very idea of the fight, remarked, "Why, some of these young Negroes are now so proud that it is hard to get along with them, but if Jeffries should be beaten by Johnson they will be crowding white women off the sidewalks and there are plenty of towns where such action as that would cause deplorable troubles" (Roberts, 1983, p. 97).

White ministers and other religious leaders spoke out passionately against the Johnson-Jeffries fight. Ironically, as noted by Gilmore (1975), "white ministers spoke out publicly against the proposed fight but rarely spoke out publicly against lynchings. Surely no minister could view a boxing match as repulsive as lynchings" (p. 34). Many black religious leaders spoke out concerning this contradiction, accusing white ministers of being more interested in the anti-fight campaign than in social justice. The militant black

Rev. Reverdy Ransom of New York sermonized, "Negroes are falsely suspected and accused of crime and no wail of protest comes from these Reverends." Ransom then asked, "Is a prize fight more revolting and atrocious than those lynchings and burnings which are of much too frequent occurrence?" (Gilmore, 1975, p. 34). In an era where lynching was a major institutionalized method used by whites to terrorize Blacks and maintain supremacy, most whites did not view lynchings as a threat to racial stability – while a Jeffries loss to Johnson was perceived as catastrophic to the racial balance of power.

Though most white Americans anticipated that Jeffries would wreak Caucasian vengeance upon Johnson, the black intruder in the racially sacred turf of the heavyweight championship, some whites were less optimistic (Spivey, 1985). As documented by various journalists, many whites believed a Johnson victory would result in widespread race riots across the country (Gilmore, 1975; Roberts, 1983). These race riots were predicted to occur in response to blacks that opted to celebrate Johnson's victory publicly. Billed as the "Fight of the Century," the Johnson-Jeffries bout was one of the most anticipate sporting event in the history of black Americans to that date (Gilmore, 1975; Roberts, 1985).

**The Fight of the Century**

On Independence Day, June 4, 1910 in Reno, Nevada, the stage was set for this historic boxing event. Few, if any, fights historically generated as much interest as the Johnson-Jeffries match. According to the New York Times, the fight was a "foremost topic of conversation among all sorts and conditions of men – and women." An estimated 18,000 to 20,000 attended the fight, and another 30,000 stood outside the New York

Times building to follow the action via the newspaper's wire service (Spivey, 1985, p. 50).

The fight, in spite of all the expectations, was not really a fight at all (Gilmore, 1975, p. 42). Perhaps the greatest joy to the mostly white spectators came as the champion entered the ring. They greeted him by loud jeers and serenaded him with "All Coons Look Alike to Me," a popular tune inspired by Jeffries's remark when as champion, he refused a challenge from Johnson (Spivey, 1985). Unfazed and determined to win, Johnson easily and confidently defeated Jim Jeffries in fifteen rounds by way of Technical Knock Out or TKO. Jeffries was clearly no match for Johnson. In fact, the fight was stopped in the 15th round of the scheduled 45 rounds after Jeffries was knocked down three times. To say the more than 30,000 people in the crowd were shocked is an understatement. The crowd was absolutely astounded! A strange funeral-like silence settled on the arena after the fight was stopped. The "Great White Hope" had failed miserably on the biggest stage to date. Unlike the general reaction to Johnson's defeat of Burns, his defeat of Jeffries was revolutionary and historic, sparking tremendous attention in the press across the country. More completely than white America realized at the time, and blacks confirmed immediately upon Johnson's victory, the outcome of the fight represented an authentic racial victory (Roberts, 1983).

Though at the time, few sports journalists refused to admit and whites in general found it difficult to accept, the outcome of the fight symbolically modified the balance of power between the races – and both black and white came to realize, the assertion of the caste system in athletics depended not upon genetic superiority, but instead on segregation. And since the fight had been billed as one to reestablish Anglo-Saxon

superiority its significance was monumental to Progressive Era society (Spivey, 1985). The unexpected outcome evoked widespread rage, dismay, and fear among whites across the country. Bob Fitzsimmons and Jim Corbett, both Jeffries managers, wept openly at Reno and newspaper headlines blared in larger type print, "JEFF MASTERED BY GRINNING, JEERING NEGRO" (Spivey, 1985, p. 150). Ardent defenders of boxing like Theodore Roosevelt and other Progressive Era politicians turned against the sport. In a classic Progressive appeal, Roosevelt wrote, "I sincerely trust that public sentiment will be aroused, and will make itself felt so effectively, as to guarantee that this is the last prize fight to take place in the United States" (Spivey, 1985, p. 150; Roberts, 1983).

**White Race Riots**

Immediately following Jeffries's defeat, white mobs unleashed their frustration and anger, initiating race riots and racial confrontations in black communities across the country, killing an estimated nineteen blacks and injuring thousands more (Roberts, 1983; Gilmore, 1975; Sammons, 1988; Spivey, 1985). Not surprisingly, every state in the South recorded racial violence following the fight. Fear of reprisal swept through the black population as the news of Johnson's victory spread. In the presence of whites, blacks dared not discuss the fight for fear of severe violence or death as a consequence. When blacks did publicly celebrate, whites responded with a measure of violence that was sure to send a clear message: violence was still the ultimate weapon against the "uppity nigger" and whites were not reluctant to resort to it when they felt the need to "keep the Negro in his place" (Spivey, 1985; Roberts, 1983).

As predicted, the outcome of the Johnson-Jeffries fight had an incredibly positive impact on black Americans. Many blacks, inspired by Johnson's example, refused to shuffle and briefly lifted their heads and raised their voices in pride (Roberts, 1983).

"Never before had whites witnessed at once such collective celebrating and race pride manifested toward a single event; never before had they witnessed such widespread effrontery exhibited. The fight had the effect of a second emancipation" (Gilmore, 1975, p. 60). Johnson's victory challenged the old notion of blacks as an inferior race and raised the specter of black rebellion against whites and the established racial hierarchy (Roberts, 1985). As widely viewed by most blacks, Johnson became an instant hero. His exploits in the ring were seen as the prototype of the independent black who acted as he pleased and accepted no bar for his conduct (Roberts, 1985; Sammons, 1988). At a time when Booker T. Washington was heralded by both blacks and whites as the Negro messiah, Johnson played a key role in broadening the landscape of possibilities for black leadership. While Washington, a well-known black accommodationist who was considered the Negro spokesperson by whites and some blacks, was often so conciliatory to whites that he was willing to blame blacks for their limitations, Johnson was not deferential to whites or anyone. He openly challenged and debated standards of white America throughout his career (Gates & West, 2000). More importantly, despite not having a highly developed racial consciousness and ostensibly no interest in representing his race, Johnson exuded an air of confidence, a sense of entitlement, and a desire to live by his own rules and standards at a time when blacks were expected to be submissive and obedient to whites (Gilmore, 1975; Marqusee, 1999; Roberts, 1983; Sammons, 1988).

Without question, Johnson was the only famous black American of his day who so utterly and completely resisted racial barriers and openly assaulted white middle-class values. He was rich when most blacks were poor; free to do as he chose when most blacks were circumscribed; and assertive when most blacks were forced to bear their

oppression in deferential silence. And when Johnson battered a white man to his knees, he was for blacks, the symbolic black man taking out his revenge on all whites for a lifetime of indignities (Gilmore, 1975). For whites, on the other hand, Johnson was not only a threat to the racial balance, he was threat a to the most cherished and prevailing cornerstone of white supremacy: the myth that whites were physically, emotionally, and intellectually superior to blacks. The outcome of this title bout disproved this ideology – provoking whites to react by engaging in a full-out assault on Johnson's world (Roberts, 1983).

## Progressive Reformers and The Ban on Fight Film

Following his fight against Jeffries, Progressive Era reformers initiated a crusade against boxing that at the beginning seemed suspicious to many blacks and whites alike (Hietala, 2002). Albeit the abolition of prizefighting was the ultimate goal of reformers and others who sought to diminish Johnson's victory, a ban on the film depicting his victory was a more immediate concern (Roberts, 1983). As Gilmore (1975) explains,

> Johnson's triumph caught many whites on the horns of a dilemma. Before the fight, confident of a victory by Jeffries, they had seen the match as one in which Anglo-Saxon supremacy would be vindicated. Faced with Johnson's victory, they now had to either repudiate their earlier views, or admit that white supremacy had sustained a mortal wound; more often than not they chose the former (p. 43).

White anxiety about the value of the Johnson-Jeffries bout to the black psyche caused many whites, including prominent politicians, Christian groups, reformers, religious leaders, sports journalists and other racists, to view the fight film as racially inflammatory. "Decency and good order require that the public exhibition of these pictures should be prohibited," wrote an editorialist for the Independent magazine (Roberts, 1983, p. 112). Reformers, such as the United Society of Christian Endeavor and the Methodist Epworth League believed that the fight film would pervert morals and

incite riots in any community where it was shown. They urged state and city governments around the country to ban its showing in theaters. In the South in particular, it was feared that large-scale "uppitiness" and violence among blacks would ensue after they viewed the film (Roberts, 1983). Although no federal law prohibiting the showing of fight film was passed until 1912, the film was banned in many communities in 1910, the year of the fight (Roberts, 1983; Spivey, 1985). Clearly the bill was passed with Johnson in mind. This was evident in the House legislative debate when U.S. Representative Seaborn A. Roddenberry of Georgia shared his views on the Johnson-Jeffries fight. He stated, "It was the grossest instance of base fraud and bogus effort at a fair fight between a Caucasian brute and African biped beast" (Spivey, 1985, p. 152).

**Interracial Relations: Black Man White Women and the Mann Act**

Many whites hated Johnson simply because he was a black conqueror of "white hopes," but much of the prejudice against him was exacerbated by his obvious preference for white women (Gilmore, 1975). Before Johnson returned to the United States after the Burns victory, disturbing rumors spread across the continent that Johnson was married to a white woman. In response to this rumor, a spokesman for the Galveston, Texas welcoming committee announced that the celebration for Johnson's victory would be called off if Johnson returned to the city with a white woman. The committee had no wish to offend white Galvestonians by honoring Johnson. Johnson denied the rumor. He claimed that his wife of two years was three-fourths black and had been born in the Black Belt of rural Mississippi. However, Johnson added, "I don't see where the outside world need concern itself with a man's private affairs" (Roberts, 1983, p. 71). Johnson's reference to private affairs undoubtedly points to his understanding of white America's anxiety about sexual contact between white women and black men.

Johnson made his association with white women public shortly after denying his marriage to yet another white woman. Despite white America's disapproval, he married three and dated at least ten to fifteen white women exclusively from the beginning of his reign as heavyweight champion in 1908 to his death in 1946. Constantly under attack for "sullying" white women, Johnson refused to change his lifestyle and concede to the pressures of the dominant culture (Spivey, 1985). The peak of white reaction to Johnson's affairs came in the fall and winter of 1912, when his association with white women became national news. National reaction to Johnson's association with white women was indication that he had reached the nadir in popularity during this period (Gilmore, 1975). As Johnson openly flouted racial conventions, marrying two white women in succession and publicly consorting with others at a time when black men were lynched for just looking at a white women, some black leaders, namely Booker T. Washington, urged him to soften his assault on white society by limiting his public appearances with white women (Roberts, 1983).

Metaphorically, Jack Johnson became the reality version of the white man's worse nightmare concerning black masculinity. He was the white man's nightmare because he completely demolished white heroes in the ring and he "dallied with" white women and made no secret of it (Marqusee, 1999). It seemed that by brute force and uncompromising disregard for the so-called Negro place, he defied all the conventions of race and gender, which governed America at the time. Unfortunately, most white Americans did not appreciate Johnson's courage. Viewed as a black menace, white America became obsessed with forcing him out of the public domain. In 1913 following a lengthy investigation and occasional harassment, the Federal Bureau of Investigation

announced an eleven-count indictment against Johnson, with charges ranging from aiding prostitution and debauchery to unlawful sexual intercourse and sodomy (Sammons, 1988, p. 43). Also known as the White Slave Traffic Act, the Mann Act prohibited men from transporting women across state borders for "immoral" purposes" (Gates & West, 2000). Using the spirit of this law, Johnson was indicted for transporting Bell Schreiber, a white woman with whom Johnson had previously lived and traveled. This arrest was made on the heels of an abduction charge in which Johnson was accused of kidnapping Lucille Cameron a 19 year-old white woman hired by Johnson to do secretarial work at his nightclub (Gilmore, 1975).

These accusations enraged many whites across the nation, especially in Chicago, provoking public protests, demonstrations and campaigns for Johnson to be lynched. For white Americans who were caught up in the national hysteria surrounding Johnson's trial, legal prohibition and punishment seemed inadequate to address the severity of Johnson's transgressions. This demand was no idle threat, for during his reign from 1908 to 1915 three hundred and forty five blacks were lynched, 89 for alleged offenses against white females (Spivey, 1985). Throughout the abduction trial, various reform organizations used this opportunity to make their case against Johnson. These groups, mostly comprised of racist prohibitionists, urged the mayor of Chicago not only to revoke Johnson's liquor license but also to shut down other establishments serving alcohol. The mayor, capitalizing on the torrent of racial abuse and death threats against Johnson, began a campaign against the town's saloons and brothels, many of which Johnson frequented. In the interval between the abduction and sentencing trials, the champion's liquor license was lifted and his interracial café closed permanently (Spivey, 1985).

During the Mann Act trial the intensity of hatred for Johnson was on full display. A mob of approximately 1,000 gathered outside the courthouse screaming, "Kill him! Lynch him!" Several propaganda comic books were produced specifically to discredit Johnson during this time. The titles of these comics, *Jack Johnson and His Girls* and *Black Ape Splitting the White Princess*, articulated white America's (especially white males) fear of black sexuality during this era (Spivey, 1985).

Backlash against Johnson came from all over the nation and from a broad range of people. For example, the press, sports heroes, prominent businessmen, ministers, the governors of South Carolina, Maryland, Virginia, and New York and ordinary citizens raged against Johnson for his affairs with white women (Gilmore, 1975; Spivey, 1985). This rage, though provoked in response to Johnson's transgressions, was not limited to Johnson. Unfortunately, many white Americans were inclined to indict the entire black race for Johnson's alleged actions. Subsequently, black waiters, porters and other black men employed in various capacities were summarily dismissed from their employment for no other reason than to retaliate for Johnson's transgressions. Even black professional men endured reprisals as a result of the bitter agitation stemming from the Cameron controversy (Gilmore, 1975).

Aside from punishing blacks economically, a significant portion of the white population across the nation viewed Johnson's troubles as detrimental to the image of the black race (Gilmore, 1975). Conditioned to believe the myth of black submissiveness and obedience to white prescriptions, many whites viewed Johnson's behaviors as offensive and threatening to the status quo. As national hero to most blacks who admired his skills and courage in the ring and sympathized with his mistreatment outside of it, white

Americans feared Johnson's influence on the black community and tried tirelessly to exclude him from the American landscape. Dubbed a discredit to his race, whites in both high and low places first pleaded with, then demanded that, Johnson recognize his "Negro place." The United Press, feeling the nationwide agitation over the abduction controversy had gotten out of hand, wired Booker T. Washington (who was considered a credit to his race), for a public statement on the matter "to restore sane public thought" (Gilmore, 1975). To his credit, Johnson never professed to be a representative to his race. In fact, he based his own defense of white accusations on his rights as an individual. "I want to say I am not a slave and that I have the right to choose who my mate shall be without the dictation of any man," he insisted. "I have eyes and I have a heart, and when they fail to tell me who I shall have for mine, I want to be put away in a lunatic asylum" (Marqusee, 1999, p. 23).

The plan by Johnson's detractors to use the abduction and Mann Act violations to put him behind bars and permanently exclude him from of mainstream society backfired. Johnson's relationship with white women though viewed by anti-Johnsonites as immoral and forced, were mutual and reciprocal. For example, Johnson was acquitted of the abduction charges when Lucille Cameron adamantly refused to substantiate the charge and witnesses against him failed to appear in court. In an act of defiance against his detractors and those who condemned him for his behaviors, Johnson married Cameron at his home less than weeks later while still on bond for the Mann Act charge (Gilmore, 1975). "This represented somewhat of an enigma to his detractors as Johnson, legally married, was much more difficult to vilify and condemn than Johnson, the accused abductor." (Gilmore, 1975, p. 106) It was the reaction to these events, revealed mainly in

the press, which formed the core of America's view of Jack Johnson and his affairs with white women. Prior to Johnson's trial for the abduction charge, the bar of white public opinion had already found him guilty. Even after Cameron's testimony in favor of Johnson, the general sentiment among whites continued to condemn him. Many Southerners, who normally lynched, murdered or maligned blacks for the slightest intimation of intimacy with white women, wished Johnson were in their part of the country (Gilmore, 1975). As evidence in various newspaper accounts cited by Gilmore (1975), whites in other parts of the country, though not known for the kind of vigilantism encouraged and tolerated in the South, also wished to see Johnson punished harshly.

In the sentencing phase of the Mann Act debacle, an all-white jury convicted Johnson despite the lack of hard evidence and sentenced him to a one-year prison term and a $1,000 fine (Sammons, 1988). Notwithstanding due process, Federal District Court Judge George Carpenter, like many during this time, evaluated Johnson's case based not on the ethics of the justice system, but on racial bias and distain for Johnson's lack of deference to the white social structure. "This defendant is one of the best known men of his race," stated Carpenter in explaining his sentencing decision. "His example has been far reaching and the court is bound to consider the position he occupies among his people. In view of these facts, this is a case that calls for more than a fine" (Spivey, 1985, p. 156).

To most blacks, Johnson was merely a victim of race prejudice and white fear of change in the social order. The white fear of interracial marriage far outweighed anything Johnson did. This fear was evident in a speech by Congressman Roddenberry in the House of Representatives on behalf of the proposed constitutional amendment against

interracial marriage (which was inspired by Johnson's marriage to white women). He projected many conscious and unconscious feelings that many whites harbored about black-white marriages during the Progressive Era. He proclaimed,

> Such unions make a "white girl the slave of an African brute," encourages "the vicious element of the Negro race," and results in "the descendants of our Anglo-Saxon fathers or mothers" having "mixed blood descended from the orangutan shores of far off Africa." Intermarriage is "abhorrent and repugnant to the very principles of pure Saxon government. It is subversive of the social peace. It is destructive of moral supremacy, and ultimately will bring this nation to a conflict as fatal and bloody as the Civil War" (Spivey, 1985, p.156).

Inspired by Johnson's and instigated by men like Roddenberry, miscegenation bills were introduced in 1913 in half of the 20 states then free of such law and, in Congress, at least 21similar bills were introduced. And while none of these bills gained final state approval, and none were enacted into law, they certainly revealed to a great extent the national impact of the Johnson-Cameron marriage – and the national hysteria that ensued when Johnson's intimate affairs with white women reached the national media (Gilmore, 1975).

**Fugitive On The Run**

Frustrated with a justice system and a white society that condemned him unjustly, Johnson fled the country while on bond and made his way from the U.S. through Canada to Europe (Sammons, 1988). In leaving the country, he became less of a dire threat to white supremacy, as his flight fulfilled the white wish to exclude him from American society and reduce the likelihood of his inspiring other blacks to emulate his behavior and challenge the longstanding American caste system (Gilmore, 1975; Sammons, 1988; Spivey, 1985). Many whites had subscribed to the hypocrisy and illusion that Johnson's absence from American soil would automatically erase his boxing accomplishments and his influence on both black and white society, and his deserved acclaim. This naiveté was

widespread and comforting to many whites who feared black supremacy was on the rise with Johnson's ascendancy. When Johnson finally lost his title in 1915 in Havana, Cuba in a controversial knockout by Jess Willard, a white challenger who was unknown and untested, white Americans celebrated, believing the potency of Johnson's mythic antagonism was further diminished. A Chicago Tribune editorial captured this sentiment, noting, "a great mass of our white citizenship simply rejoiced at the outcome of the fight. It is a point of pride with the ascendant race not to concede supremacy in anything, not even to a gorilla" (Spivey, 1985, p.156). Missing from this editorial and other journalistic accounts of the fight by the predominantly white press was the controversial knockout.

According to many, including sportswriters, friends and boxing historians, Johnson fixed the fight in order to return home to the states (Gilmore, 1975; Sammons, 1988). It was widely known by both blacks and whites that Willard was not nearly as skilled and heralded as Jeffries and had never won the heavyweight title. Therefore, the chances of Johnson losing a fair fight to Willard were highly improbable. However, given the treatment he endured after his defeat of Jeffries, Johnson was sure he had no chance of returning successfully to America as a fugitive and a heavyweight champion. So, when the opportunity arose, Johnson took a punch, fell to the canvas and raised his arm to shield his eyes from the sun. Johnson maintained he lost the fight on purpose so as to receive a light prison sentence upon his return to the States (Sammons, 1988). Photographs of the fight illustrate Johnson's intentions. They reveal that he was barely touched by Willard when he went down. Under normal circumstances, Johnson's decision to fix the fight would have been criticized and considered unprofessional by the most boxing fans. Notwithstanding, he received very little criticism for his actions and

was able to return home quietly five years after he fled to serve his one-year prison term. Because he was no longer a threat to white America, by his own accounts, he was treated well in jail and later married his third white wife in 1925 without significant backlash (Spivey, 1985).

Johnson's detractors did not share Johnson's view of his defeat. Though few Americans knew much about Willard was as a boxer, or Willard the person, many praised him as the savior of white supremacy. They believed that what Jeff Jeffries had failed to do in 1910, Jess Willard had accomplished in 1915: dethrone Jack Johnson and return the heavyweight champion title to the white race. Willard's victory symbolically restored white supremacy. "Jess Willard's 'triumph' enabled millions of his fellow citizens to sit down to their dinners last night with renewed confidence in their eight inch biceps, flexed, and twenty-eight inch chests, expanded." Willard further obliged his "fellow citizens" by declaring that he would fight no black challengers" (Spivey, 1985, p. 156). For 22 years following Johnson's defeat, the heavyweight division was once again segregated until Joe Louis was allowed to fight and then won the title in 1937. Though Johnson never retained his former celebrity status or achieved complete rehabilitation in public repute, he had a relatively successful life after boxing (Odd, 1977).

Victory made Johnson bolder and quicker to challenge racial customs. "No longer the respectful darky, hat in hand, waiting for massa's permission," Johnson was championed by blacks as the prototype of the independent black who acted as he pleased and accepted no bar to his conduct (Roberts, 1983). He foreshadowed, and in many ways helped create, the "New Negro" –a term popularized during the Harlem Renaissance to describe a more militant black who was disillusioned with southern white racism,

northern de facto discrimination, and the undelivered promises of American democracy (Sammons, 1988).

Jack Johnson, whether viewed as a villain or folk hero, was an important revolutionary figure in the early decades of the twentieth century. Lambasted by American whites because he was unbeatable in the ring and practically ungovernable outside of it, Johnson was loved, hated, and feared by blacks for the same reason. At the heyday of Social Darwinism's emphasis on survival of the fittest, Johnson so clearly demolished his white boxing opponents that whites began to doubt their racial "superiority"(Gilmore, 1975).

**Introduction to Psychological Analysis of White Reaction to Jack Johnson**

As mentioned previously, white reaction to Jack Johnson exemplifies the psychological dimensions of white racism, in particular, white Progressive Era racism. In the following pages, I will address this dimension by providing an analysis of white reaction, using the psychological mechanisms outlined in this chapter. By the conclusion of this analysis, it should be evident that white reaction to Johnson was driven by psychological factors related to the black progress, which poses a threat to the supremacy of whiteness.

**The Fight of the Century: White Reaction To The Black Champion**

White hysteria before and after Johnson's historic defeat of Jeffries epitomized the intense emotional and psychological discomfort whites felt about black success and how this success would negatively impact white supremacist ideology. In fact, prior to the fight, whites feared the disturbing possibility that if Johnson won, blacks around the country and especially in the south would interpret his victory as more than physical equality with whites. "If the black man wins," New York Times editorialists noted,

"thousands and thousands of his ignorant brothers will misinterpret his victory as justifying claims to much more than mere physical equality with their white neighbors" (Roberts, 1983). Southerners, in particular, believed a Johnson victory would increase the possibility of physical contact between young, proud blacks and white women (Roberts, 1983). In general, the degree of fear and anxiety associated with this fight for racial superiority was both enormous and critical to white reaction to Johnson's victory. An article written in the Los Angeles Times clearly demonstrates the extent to which many whites feared the fight would positively impact blacks. The article read,

> Do not point your nose too high. Do not swell your chest too much. Do not boast too loudly. Do not be puffed. Let not your ambition be inordinate or take a wrong direction. Remember, you have done nothing at all. You are just the same member of society today you were last week. You are on no higher plane, deserve no new consideration, and you will get none. No man will think a bit higher of you because your complexion is the same as that of the victor at Reno (Gilmore, 1975, p. 44).

Indeed, Johnson's defeat of Jeffries provoked widespread rage, dismay and fear among whites. Predictably, white-initiated race riots erupted across the country (including every southern state) resulting in the deaths of 19 blacks. Even when blacks celebrated, whites responded with severe violence and intimidation. No doubt, this was done to show blacks that violence was still the ultimate weapon to keep blacks or "uppity niggers" in their place (Spivey, 1985).

Billed as the fight of the century, the outcome of the fight dramatized the core of white anxiety concerning black success in any facet of white society. Indeed, as if to buffer or soften the potential blow of Johnson's victory, white fear and anxiety regarding Johnson's impact was projected onto him and other blacks. As remarked by a correspondent for the New York World, "There is a growing suspicion that no matter how bad a man Johnson may be – and he is bad undoubtedly – popular clamor and race

prejudice are making him blacker than he is" (Gilmore, 1975, p. 110). It is my contention that the historical representation of Johnson is a caricature and reflects the deep-seated fears and anxieties whites had about black equality and black upward mobility at the time. Johnson was considered a menace to white society not because he posed a real threat to law and order. Indeed, he was a menace because he was black and, unlike Joe Louis, he refused to live as the white man's hero (Spivey, 1985). "By any standard, white Americans' response to Johnson was excessive" (Beaderman, 1995, p. 4). Accordingly, to fully comprehend Johnson's impact on race relations during the Progressive Era, it is imperative to examine how white reaction to Johnson made him a larger-than-life antagonist. Through probing white reaction to Johnson the psychological elements inherent in white racism are revealed.

**Ban on Fight Film: Denial of Jeffries Defeat**

White Progressive reformers involved in the movement against screening the film of Johnson's victory justified their advocacy by claiming that the film would pervert morals and initiate race riots in any community where the film was shown (Gilmore, 1975; Hietala, 2000; Roberts, 1983; Spivey, 1985). "The prospect of the filmic reenactment of the 'Negroes Deliverer' thrashing the 'White Hope' in hundreds of movie theaters across the nation was too much for them, however" (Beaderman, 1995, p. 2). Effectively, the ban sought to destroy the perception of black progress and equality among blacks (Roberts, 1983). As was the thinking at the time, "to display Johnson's victory over and over again in movie theaters would irreparably harm American race relations" (Roberts, 1983, p. 112). Despite efforts to disguise the real impetus for prohibiting the screening of the fight film, it is my contention that this crusade was inspired by white fear of black confidence. White political and civic leaders in particular,

feared that showing the film across the country (especially in the South) would arouse widespread confidence and race pride among blacks. Blacks, they feared, would emulate Johnson's self-assurance in the ring and become "uppity" and resistant to white authority if shown the film. Race pride among blacks was, and still is, the antithesis of white supremacy. When blacks are proud, they are less likely to internalize stereotypes and other negative messages from whites, especially proud black men.

**Mann Act: White Retaliation**

White obsession with Johnson's interracial marriages and romantic associations with white women exemplified white pathology. The ferocity with which the white establishment went after Johnson for transgressing racial boundaries was disproportionate to the actual violation. At the core of this viciousness was white patriarchal fear of black sexuality, miscegenation and Johnson's ability to attract white women. Johnson's conduct with white women was viewed as reprehensible, especially to white men who viewed white women as theirs exclusively (Hietala, 2002).

The accusation that Johnson violated the Mann Act (the transportation of white women across state lines for immoral purposes) and the alleged abduction charge were both legal maneuvers employed by white authorities to appease the level of fear and anxiety provoked by Johnson's exploits by putting him on trail. The abduction charge in particular, was an ingenious conspiracy by the federal government not only to make Johnson the focal point of white discomfort but also to link Johnson's association with white women to the myth of the black rapist. Despite the fact that Lucille Cameron denied emphatically that she had not been abducted, the white public was outraged (Gilmore, 1975). In fact, many who were caught up in the national hysteria surrounding this charge demanded that Johnson be lynched publicly for all to see – especially other

black men. This of course, was no idle threat. During Johnson's reign, 354 blacks were brutally lynched – 89 of whom were reportedly lynched for offenses against white women. When Johnson was acquitted of the abduction charge, white hatred was again fueled and public outraged reached the point of mass hysteria.

Johnson's white slavery trail became a morality play in interracial intimacy and the supposed need to protect white women from black men (Hietala, 2002). In reality, this trail was an expression of white anxiety about sex between black men and white women. More concretely, Johnson's ability to attract white women, (albeit white prostitutes) led many white men to feel intimidated and inadequate in regards to black men's alleged sexual prowess and supposed physical endowments (Chehade, 2001; Hodes, 1997) Since the days of slavery, white southern men in particular, subscribed to the belief that white women secretly desired black slaves. This thinking, as outlined in Chapter 3, resulted from white slaveholders, own guilt regarding their indiscretions with female slaves. Unfortunately for Johnson, this allegation of sexual prowess among black males was buttressed by quasi-scientific evidence that argued that the major cause of disease among blacks was the "immense amount of immorality which is a race trait" (Gilmore, 1975). Using this information as evidence that white women (who were thought to be ideal and virtuous) needed to be protected from Johnson, Progressive Era reformers pursued Johnson's conviction with vengeance and justified purpose. Ironically, all of the women Johnson associated with were either prostitutes or call women – they could hardly be described as ideals of feminine virtue and innocence (Roberts, 1983).

"There is nothing more infuriating and revolting to the Southern white man, and only to a slightly lesser degree to his brother up North, than the thought of Negro men

'messing with white women,' a phrase reserved for any Negro male–white female relationship" (*The White Problem*, 1966, p. 66). White obsession with interracial sex evolved out of particular social, political and economic circumstances. Before emancipation, the hierarchy of race rested on the categories of black and white as well as on the categories of slavery and freedom. Conversely, after emancipation, categories of color bore the entire burden of upholding racial hierarchy (Hodes, 1997). Therefore, the maintenance of racial hierarchy through other means became essential to white southerners. Consequently, we see the mixture of European and African ancestry come to be a much more serious taboo than ever before (Hodes, 1997). Dynamics of racial liaisons then, developed meaning and significance associated with black freedom, in particular, the freedom of black men. Freed black men, in the eyes of white patriarchs were dangerous to the maintenance of racial hierarchy when they showed interest in white women. "Black freedom brought about a marked shift from uneasy white toleration for sex between black men and white women, and a move toward increasingly violent intolerance" (Hodes, 1997, p. 147).

With this as a context, Johnson's penchant for white women was viewed as a threat to white supremacy in the form of blurring the divide between black and white. The rigid categories of black and white were being blurred by Johnson's interracial marriages, and for that reason, he was viewed as a trespasser charged with seeking to disrupt or destroy the racial caste system. During Johnson's time white progressives and non-progressives alike who longed for the nostalgia of the past, also believed in the stereotype of the hypersexual black man. For this reason, it was feared that Johnson, through his alleged misconduct with white women would encourage other black men to

have affairs with white women. This inclination of whites to indict the entire black race for the notoriety of Johnson's alleged actions illustrates the fear inherent in whites' perceptions of Johnson and black men in general. Despite pleading by black leaders, many black waiters, porters and other black men employed in various capacities were dismissed from their employment (Gilmore, 1975). "Even black professional men suffered reprisals as a result of the bitter agitation stemming from the Cameron controversy" (Gilmore 1975, p. 100).

Perhaps more than anything, Johnson's physicality exacerbated the racial fears and hostilities of whites. Johnson's physical attributes epitomized white stereotypes of black male sexuality. He was tall, imposing, muscular, athletic and dark black in complexion; his head was shaved bald and his wide grin accentuated his gold teeth. Impeccably dressed, Johnson often wore flamboyant colors both in and outside the ring. "In public he wore tight fitting silk shirts and liked his companion of the hour to run her hands over his chest and back" (Roberts, 1983). It was reported that Johnson changed his clothes at least three times a day and always dressed for dinner. Sometimes after training at a local gym, he would emerge resplendent in a new suit, with a cane and the latest thing in golf caps (Roberts, 1983). On the day of his fight with Jeffries, he wore pink pajamas as boxing tights. "And not an 'inoffensive' pink, but what a Los Angeles Times reporter described as 'one of those screaming, cater-wauling, belligerent pinks'" (Roberts, 1983, p. 22).

Inside the ring Johnson consciously exploited the myth of black sexuality. "Perhaps the most blatant exploitation of the myth was a practice he sometimes employed while training of wrapping his penis in gauze bandages, enhancing its size for all to see"

(Roberts, 1983, p. 74). Indeed, almost everything Johnson did enhanced the image of his sexuality – the slightly lascivious smile; the speed with which he drove his cars; the loose and easy boxing style; the attraction of prostitutes; and the inability to stay in any one place for very long (Gilmore, 1975; Roberts, 1983; Sammons 1988).

Whites who resented Johnson's prominence and abhorred his conduct were both enraged and fearful of his sexuality (Hietala, 2002). The fact that Johnson was rich when most blacks and many whites were poor; free to do as he chose when most blacks were circumscribed; and braggadocious when many blacks were forced to bear their oppression in silence, compounded white anxiety and hatred toward him (Gilmore, 1975). This anxiety and hatred was expressed by many white reporters who equated his sexuality, especially in the ring, with something to be feared, something inherently dangerous. To some white reporters, his body expressed controlled, even hidden, power (Gilmore, 1975). One reporter described him "as a good-natured black animal that was no different from the stereotypical slave – lazy, powerful, happy, carefree" (Gilmore, 1975, p. 21). "Yet reporters sensed something deeper, a carnivorous potential for violence. He was ""good natured' but still a 'black animal'; he moved defensively, but when hurt his eyes 'glared like a wild beast's'" (Gilmore, 1975, p. 21). These kinds of racially derogatory stereotypes were common descriptors of Johnson throughout his reign. For whites, these stereotypes functioned to discredit Johnson's appeal as well as to control the mystique surrounding Johnson's blatant sexual expression. Additionally, white men, the envy of Johnson's masculinity, feared his success with white women proved him a superior specimen of manhood (Beaderman, 1995). In the end, his "championship, as well as his self-consciously flamboyant, sexual public persona, was intolerable – and an

intentional challenge to white American's widespread beliefs that male power stemmed from white supremacy" (Beaderman, 1995, p. 5).

## Black Menace

Even before Johnson's historic victory over Jeffries, the American public began to perceive him as a Bad Nigger – a black man who publicly expressed a different attitude and station from the ones prescribed by white society (Roberts, 1983).

> They saw the way in which he challenged white authority in his numerous brushes with the law. They heard stories of his nightlife, the lurid tales of his weeklong drunks and parties. Tales of his sexual bouts were also told, and his shaved head came to symbolize the sexual virility of the black male. But most shocking of all were the times he appeared in public with white women (Roberts, 1983, p. 70).

In black folklore the Bad Nigger was a standard character. He was usually a black man who through his reckless lifestyle openly courted destruction. When the word bad in Bad Nigger was pronounced "ba-ad," the term becomes a badge of honor worn proudly by blacks (in particular black men) for whom being subversive and resistant to limitations of white society represented the ultimate in the emancipated black (Roberts, 1983). Bad Niggers were the antithesis to white morality and typically violated the most sacred white customs and traditions.

To whites, Johnson was the embodiment of the Ba-ad Nigger. He rebelled against the color line and resisted any attempts by white authority to control him, publicly declaring his desire to be his own man (Spivey, 1985). In the ring, he was totally confident and exuded none of the submissiveness and obedience whites expected when competing against white opponents. With this as a context, Johnson's emergence provoked widespread anxiety that his presence in American culture would pose a threat to the racial balance of the Progressive Era. Because he had access to the biggest and

perhaps one of the most revered stages at the time, whites, in particular white patriarchs, feared his influence on the larger black community. They feared he would inspire other blacks to break the mold of the humble and submissive Negro (Spivey, 1985). These fears were not without merit. In 1912 a highly publicized incident occurred where a black man married a 15 year-old mentally retarded white girl. According to the Chicago Record Herald, the black man was quoted as saying that he had a right to marry the young girl "if Jack Johnson could marry Lucille Cameron." He went on to say, "Her mother is raving because I am colored. She thinks I ain't good enough. But if Jack Johnson is good enough to marry a white women, why can't I marry one?" (Gilmore, 1975, p. 109). A year later, influenced by Representative Seaborn Roddenberry of Georgia and others, miscegenation bills were introduced in half of the 21 states where the law did not exist (Gilmore, 1975).

To conclude, Johnson's impact on white America during his era revealed the most explosive and most pathological element underlying the nation's and particularly the South's, resistance to change: the fear of the Negro as a sexual competitor ("The White Problem," 1966, p. 66). White fear of miscegenation was the primary motivation for the majority of the backlash against Johnson throughout his career. His marriage to three white women and his romantic involvement with countless others threatened to change patterns of racial hierarchy, effectively provoking many whites to fear his influence in a society desperate to keep blacks in a confined social status. The hype leading up Johnson's fight against Jeffries essentially foreshadowed the national frenzy displayed after his victory and until his eventual defeat in 1915. White fear and anxiety regarding Johnson's impact was projected onto him and other blacks. As remarked by a correspondent for the New York World, "There is a growing suspicion that no matter

how bad a man Johnson may be – and he is bad undoubtedly – popular clamor and race prejudice are making him blacker than he is" (Gilmore, 1975, p. 110). Therefore, it is my contention that the historical representation of Johnson is a caricature and reflects deep fears and anxieties whites had about black equality and black upward mobility at the time. Johnson was considered a menace to white society not because he posed a real threat to law and order. Indeed, he was a menace because he was black and he was independent of total white control. Accordingly, to fully comprehend Johnson's impact on race relations during the Progressive era, it is imperative to examine how white reaction to Johnson made him larger-than-life antagonist. Through probing white reaction to Johnson the psychological elements inherent in white racism are revealed.

# CHAPTER 4

# ANALYSIS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS: WHITE REACTION TO MUHAMMAD ALI

## Introduction to Muhammad Ali, 1964-1970

Like Johnson, Muhammad Ali was troublesome to his sport and the larger white society. Ali, the third black heavyweight champion, behind Johnson and Joe Louis, won his first championship in 1964, but was stripped of the title in 1967 for his opposition to the Vietnam War. During the early part of the 1960s, Ali was caught up in contemporary social and political conflicts, becoming the champion of black militancy against white bigotry, of peace against war, of youth against age, of 1960s radicalism against 1940s liberalism, and all forms of resistance to the establishment (Spivey, 1985). His decision to convert from Christianity to Islam and his subsequent name change from Cassius Clay to Muhammad Ali provoked instant judgment and condemnation from white America in general, and the media in particular. For example, almost unanimously, the media refused to use Ali's new name (Hauser, 1991). Even as the heavyweight champion of the world, Ali was not immune to white racism. He faced segregation in nearly every area of his life away from the boxing ring, especially in the South were he was born and raised (Gorn, 1986).

Ali was a unique athlete. Famously known for his "trash talking" and psychological intimidation of opponents, he routinely predicted the round in which he would knock his opponent out, which was unprecedented for any prizefighter, especially one who was young and untested. After his unprecedented victory over Liston, Ali jumped around the ring proclaiming, "I am the greatest! I am the King!" (Miller & Kenedi, 1999, p. 12). And, "I am the greatest! I shook up the world! I don't have a mark

on my face! I'm pretty! I'm a bad man! You must listen to me! I can't be beat! I'm the prettiest thing that ever lived" (p. 41).

In an era characterized and defined by black disenfranchisement and political and social unrest, Ali's extracurricular activities were often viewed as incongruent with the goals of civil rights and black liberation. His braggadocio disposition was highly criticized by some fight fans, sportswriters, and other heavyweight boxers and their supporting cast. For Jimmy Cannon, a Joe Louis loyalist and an "old school" beat writer for the New York Post, Ali was a disgrace to the sport and unfaithful to his place in the racial hierarchy (Remnick, 1998). Robert Lipsyte, a longtime Ali fan and sports journalist for the New York Times, talked about Cannon's perceptions of Ali in Remnick's (1998) book, *King of the World: Muhammad Ali and The Rise of An American Hero*. Cannon's views were consistent with how many white journalists and ordinary white citizens viewed Ali. Lipsyte (1980) observed,

> Joe Louis called Cannon "Mr. Cannon" for a long time. He was a humble kid. Now here comes Cassius Clay popping off and abrasive and loud, and it was a jolt for a lot of sportswriters like Cannon. That was a transition period. What Clay did was make guys stand up and decide which side of the fence they were on. Clay upset the natural order of things at two levels. The idea that he was a loud braggart brought disrespect to this noble sport. Or so the Cannon people said. Never mind that Rocky Marciano was a slob who would show up at events in a T-shirt so that the locals would buy him good clothes. They said that Clay 'lacked dignity.' Clay combined Little Richard and Gorgeous George. He was not the sort of sweet dumb pet that writers were accustomed to. Clay did not need the sportswriters as a prism to find his way. He transcended the sports press. Jimmy Cannon, Red Smith, so many of them, were appalled. They didn't see the fun in it. And above all, it was fun (1988, p. 157).

Clearly, Ali was no Joe Louis. Indeed, he admired Jack Johnson and denigrated Joe Louis (Spivey, 1985). While Louis was compliant, Ali was brash. As a boxer, Louis was quiet and workmanlike, letting his fist do the talking. By contrast, Ali was loquacious; he recited his own brand of poetry that often demeaned his opponents prior to

and following a fight (Gorn, 1986). Comparisons between Ali and Johnson are apropos because both, in distinct yet similar, challenged the core contradictions in American society during their time. As Gorn (1986) explains,

> Like Johnson, Ali was a rebel, but a very different kind of rebel. While Johnson was hated, in part because of his penchant for white women, fine clothes, partying, and drinking, Ali did not flout conventional morality – at least not in such conventional ways. Rather, Ali was unpopular because of his association with a militant black organization, the Nation of Islam, and his position on a number of issues, including the Vietnam War. In a society that was moving, perhaps reluctantly, toward integration, he was comfortable with separation – but he endorsed racial separation in the name of autonomous black power (p. 66).

Refusing to adopt the role of docile, accommodating, black athlete, Ali went beyond white limits of acceptability in his beliefs and behavior. Pride as a black man was taken as a sign of arrogance, and his embrace of Islam and his name change were interpreted as indications of contempt for whites, both serious indictments for black Americans in the 1960s (Gorn, 1986). Ali took full advantage of his status as a respected black athlete. While black athletes of earlier decades were inclined to ignore or privately complain about mistreatment, black athletes of the 1960s, led by Ali, began to confront racial injustice. "A new black athlete was evolving, one who like Ali, was assertive, defiant, proud of his or her blackness, and willing to sacrifice athletic reward and profits to maintain dignity. The sports world would be permanently altered" (Gorn, 1986, p. 60).

**From Christianity to Nation of Islam**

In 1964, at a time of unprecedented social unrest over the issue of civil rights and black liberation, rumors surfaced that Cassius Clay was a card-carrying member of the Nation of Islam (NOI) (Sugden, 1996). While preparing for the biggest fight of his young career, Clay invited Malcolm X to his camp in Miami. Malcolm's presence proved to be an inspiration to the fighter – but it was hurting the gate. Though many white Floridians

were anxious to witness the David-versus-Goliath match between Clay and Sonny Liston, they were not inclined to see a brash young black man, much less a Black Muslim, in the role of David (Remnick, 1998). Bill MacDonald, the fight's promoter, had to gross approximately $800,000 to break even on the fight, and with the decline in ticket sales due to Malcolm's presence in Clay's camp, it was becoming increasingly clear that he was not going to make the projected amount.

Finally, three days before the fight, MacDonald confronted Clay about the press reports and told him that Malcolm's presence in his camp might cost him a shot at the title. MacDonald wanted Clay to go public and deny reports of his affiliation with the Nation. Clay knew MacDonald was right about the status of ticket sales, but refused to deny his ties to the Nation. He was willing to pass on this opportunity to fight stating, "My religion's more important to me than the fight" (Remnick, 1998, p. 171). Clay was prepared to leave Miami, had it not been for a last minute decision by Clay's publicist to ask Malcolm to leave town until the day of the fight. Malcolm agreed and the fight was on (Remnick, 1988).

Clay's refusal to lie about his affiliation with the Nation of Islam in 1964 foreshadowed how he would handle subsequent controversial matters. From his decision to convert to Islam, to his unpopular opposition to the Vietnam War, Ali was determined to live his life according to his beliefs and refused to accept old stereotypes of the black athlete as deferential and apolitical. A case in point, the morning after his unprecedented defeat of Sonny Liston, winning his first heavyweight championship, Clay was asked at his morning press conference whether or not he was a "card-carrying member" of the Black Muslims. To this point, Clay had not publicly announced his conversion to Islam,

but had assumed everyone was aware of this. He responded not to the question, but to the terminology "card-carrying" and Black Muslims, both terms considered repugnant to members of the Nation.

> "Card-carrying. What does that mean?" Clay said. "I believe in Allah and in peace. I don't try to move into white neighborhoods. I don't want to marry a white woman. I was baptized when I was twelve, but I didn't know what I was doing. I'm not Christian anymore. I know where I'm going and I know the truth, and I don't have to be what you want me to be. I'm free to be what I want" (Remnick, 1988, p.207).

In challenging white assumptions about Black Muslims, Clay asserted himself as a free black man. He was well aware that of the few white people who knew something about the NOI, most saw it as a frightening sect with a criminal membership (Marqusee, 1999; Remnick, 1988; Sammons 1990).

Clay's statements, "I don't have to be what you want me to be," and "I am free to be what I want," are statements representing not only his independence but also his attempt to control his public image (Hauser, 1991; Marqusee, 1990; Remnick, 1988). Even as an adolescent, Clay portrayed an air of public confidence rarely exhibited by blacks during that time. Known for being brash and outspoken, he was praised as a likable young athlete with uncommon wit, talent and crowd appeal. His public debut occurred at the 1960 Olympics when, as the light heavyweight gold medalist, he told a Russian reporter that the United States is the best country in the world. It was during the pre-heavyweight years that Clay was publicly portrayed as warm, patriotic, clean-living, enthusiastic, friendly, articulate, humorous, and most importantly, obedient to his white managers. The press hailed him as a rejuvenating force in the stagnant fight game (Spivey, 1985).

Positive sentiment toward Clay changed immediately after he announced his conversion to Islam. Two days after his defeat of Sonny Liston, he informed the press that he had indeed joined the Nation of Islam, a religious group considered by some both black and white to be one of the most divisive political black organizations to date (Gates & West, 2000; Gorn, 1986; Remnick, 1988; Sammons, 1988). Malcolm X, perhaps the most popular and politically radical member, had a tremendous impact on Clay's decision to join the Nation.

The doctrine of the NOI and Malcolm X's radical style was threatening to whites and the dominant social structure. Predicated on ideals such as Black Nationalism and black separatism, the Nation of Islam was a religious and social movement that demonized white America while promoting black uplift (Marqusee, 1999). Frightening to most whites and some blacks, members of the group believed that evil and destruction were the work of whites because in their view, whites are inherently wicked. The NOI also rejected integration, deeming it undesirable and antithetical to black upward mobility and emotional well-being. Malcolm X, in particular, in rhetoric intelligible to all, was able to verbally strip back the layers of white hypocrisy and confront white racism as no other black man had (Marqusee, 1999). Detractors, on the other hand, viewed the Nation as a polarizing force, claiming it was out of touch with a country that was moving toward equal rights for all of its citizens. The press denounced Clay's conversion and others quickly followed suit (Gorn, 1986).

White reaction to Clay's conversion was swift and immediate. Given the press vilification of the NOI, in particular Malcolm X, many whites were publicly outraged and displeased with Clay's decision, viewing his conversion a rejection of Christianity and

America (Gorn, 1986). Clay's conversion also provoked many whites to question his views on race relations and question his espousal of black separatism. The general consensus of most whites was the belief that Clay's views on American race relations were misinformed, misplaced and divisive.

> To many in the white community, Clay's membership in the Nation of Islam was both frightening and detestable. His involvement with a group that advocated separation of the races was reprehensible to whites who expected black champions to concentrate on boxing and refrain from speaking out on racial and political issues. Rather than acquiescing to the sport establishment and assuming the subservient role traditionally assigned black athletes, Ali acted "inappropriately" by showing contempt for white authority and values. Instead of being appreciative for his many opportunities, Ali had the audacity to call America an oppressive society and insist on a separate homeland for blacks (Gorn, 1986, p. 89).

Clay, on other hand, unapologetic about all the negative public opinion, defended his decision and his religion. In his response to the general misrepresentation of Islam, he reflected on the ongoing black struggle for freedom and liberation, white racism, and his desire to live in a segregated community. Here is how Ali responded to his critics,

> 'Black Muslims' is a press word. It's not a legitimate name. The real name is 'Islam.' That means peace. Islam is a religion and there are seven hundred and fifty million people all over the world who believe in it, and I'm one of them. I ain't no Christian. I can't be, when I see all the colored people fighting for forced integration getting blown up. They get hit by stones and chewed by dogs, and they blow up a Negro church and don't find the killers. I get telephone calls everyday. They want me to carry signs, they want me to picket. They tell me it would be a wonderful thing if I married a white woman because this would be good for brotherhood. I don't want to be blown up. I don't want to be washed down sewers. I just want to be happy with my own kind. I'm the heavyweight champion, but right now there are some neighborhoods I can't move into. I know how to dodge booby traps and dogs. I dodge them by staying in my own neighborhood. I'm no troublemaker. I don't believe in forced integration. I know where I belong. I'm not going to force myself into anybody's house (Remnick, 1998, p.208).

Clay embraced the NOI with great fervor and was unquestionably devoted to Muslim leadership and faith in Allah throughout his career. In joining the Nation, Clay

for the first time was able to experience the social awakening of self. The Nation preached self-reliance and infused blacks with pride. Their goal was to break the mental chains that held blacks in bondage. Whites, they believed, would never grant blacks and other people of color true equality, making the quest for integration impractical (Gorn, 1986; Marqusee, 1999). To Clay, the agitation in the South and the brutal white response seemed to confirm two of the Nation's central tenets: the beauty and strength of black people and the irredeemable racism of white America (Marqusee, 1999). Muslim doctrine unlike the doctrine of Martin Luther King and other civil rights leaders, gave him the faith and single-mindedness necessary to combat injustices in American society (Gorn, 1986).

## From Cassius Clay to Muhammad Ali

As if his conversion to Islam was not enough to provoke outrage and hatred, Clay's public pronouncement of his name change from Cassius Marcellus Clay, a slave name, to Muhammad Ali, a Muslim name, stunned the white press and the white public. Clay's name change symbolized a personal and political affront to both the white power structure and white expectation of black athletes (Marqusee, 1999).

> This was a black man signaling by his name change not a desire to ingratiate himself with mainstream America, but a comprehensive rejection of it. By adopting the name Muhammad Ali at the command of Elijah Muhammad, Cassius Clay claimed a new heritage, a new nation, a new family. In doing so, he exposed the American order as something other than a fact of nature (Marqusee, 1999, p.86).

For some time after he changed his name, Ali faced unbending hostility. Many people, mostly whites, continued to address him or refer to him by what he called his slave name. Almost unanimously, the media refused to write about Ali using his Muslim name (Hauser, 1991). Taking an extreme position on this issue, The New York Times,

insisted on calling him Ali Cassius Clay throughout the 1960s (Marqusee, 1999). Undeterred, Ali continued to assert his independence. Whether the press and the rest of society understood it or not, he had quietly forsaken the image of the unthreatening black athlete and prizefighter popularized by Joe Louis, Jessie Owens and others disinterested in challenging white racism in sport. Through his name change, Ali declared his independence from black stereotypes and demonstrated he would not follow any standard of behavior, white or black (Gorn, 1986).

Ali's conversion to Islam and his subsequent name change were both unprecedented decisions at the time. Similarly, his exhibition of black pride, his opposition to integration, and his public statements against white hypocrisy, were considered radical and dangerous. However, following years of struggle for freedom, justice and equality, blacks, especially urban and southern blacks, began to show signs of impatience with Martin Luther King and other black leaders who sought to gain civil rights through nonviolence and integration. Dissatisfied with the slow pace of integration, many blacks looked to alternative movements and individual black people for guidance and inspiration. In this context, Ali's proclamations were viewed by many blacks as refreshing, brash, courageous, radical, and most importantly, progressive. He was widely perceived as an independent black man willing to challenge white racism without fear of retaliation, risking his career and lucrative earnings in exchange for religious freedom and respect as a black man.

In addition to possessing superior boxing skills, Ali exhibited black pride in the public arena. His religion taught him that blacks were not inferior to whites; in contrast whites were inferior to blacks. Along this line, instead of praying to and "preaching"

about a white God, Muslims believed in a God who was black, making blackness something to be proud of rather than something to apologize for. What most whites knew about the NOI was how the mostly white media portrayed the organization as endorsing violence and white hatred. Therefore, whites perceived Ali's conversion as a sign black power and a rejection of white middle class values. Furthermore, his conversion almost immediately subjected him to the kind of vilification that had been the lot of the Nation of Islam for years. As a result, he placed his black constituency on a higher footing than the white audience to whom black performers were normally beholden. For this, Ali earned legions of black admirers (Marqusee, 1999).

**Ali: Black Athlete as Role Model**

Black athletes in particular looked to Ali as a role model and a pioneer in changing the image of the black athlete. In the words of Harry Edwards, well known sports sociologist and principle advocate of the attempted boycott of the Mexico City Olympics in 1968, "Ali is probably the single greatest athletic figure of this century in terms of the black community, largely because he turned around the image of the black athlete" (Hauser, 1991, p. 449). Before Ali, black athletes often struggled for dignity, respect, and the kind of recognition bestowed upon less deserving white athletes. For many black athletes including the great Bill Russell, track stars Tommie Smith and John Carlos, Jim Brown, and Kareem Abdul Jabar, to name a few, the awareness of white racism in sport was an everyday reality. Despite their athletic achievements, they were still treated as marginal and second-class citizens, not unlike the average black American in the 1960s. With Ali in the lead, black athletes planned and executed several pivotal public protests against white racial injustice. The most notable of these events took place at the 1968 Olympics when Tommy Smith and John Carlos raised their fists in black

power salute on the victory stand. Collectively, these public demonstrations were part of the "The Revolt of the Black Athlete Movement." Inspired by Ali and guided by black athletes and their mostly black supporters, this movement proved to be as influential to the long-term progress of the black athlete as Jackie Robinson's historic integration of baseball.

## Draft Evasion

Distain for white American opinion about him and his views was Ali's trademark throughout the 1960s. Perhaps this was no more evident than when he refused to honor the draft in 1966 claiming conscientious objector status because of his religious beliefs (Spivey, 1985). After learning he had been reclassified 1-A, fit for combat by the Louisville draft board and ordered to serve (in 1964 Ali was classified way below the qualifying standard after failing the selective service exam twice), Ali was perplexed and disappointed by the decision. He could not understand how it was possible to be eligible for the draft after failing the qualifying exam twice. Amid his confusion and disorientation regarding the news, Ali blurted out what would live on as perhaps the most pithy of all antiwar expressions at a time when few dared to oppose the conflict; "Man, I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong" (Hauser, 1991). He went on to claiming that he was "not going ten thousand miles from the United States to help murder and kill poor people simply to help continue the domination of white slave masters over the darker people" (Spivey, 1985, p. 173). America's presence in the Vietnam War was still popular in February 1966 when Ali made these statements. Naturally, the Department of Justice rejected Ali's application for conscientious objector status on the ground that he was "politically and racially motivated." A year later, in April 1967, the champion refused to step forward for induction into the army. Within 24 hours and long before Ali would be

tried and found guilty for his actions, the World Boxing Association (WBA) rescinded his title and the New York Athletic Commission (which had licensed 90 felons, including rapists and murderers) lifted his boxing license. Soon after, all other jurisdictions in the United States followed suit (Hauser, 1986; Hauser, 1991).

"The avalanche of criticism, oppression, and legal action that followed Ali's refusal to service in the military unveiled a level of paranoia not felt in this country since the McCarthy era" (Sammons, 1988, p. 204). Already outraged by Ali's conversion and name change, white America responded to his refusal to participate in the war with a vengeance. The mostly white public turned against him again. In the days and months following his declarative and controversial statements, Ali's phone rang incessantly, with calls not only from reporters but also from people who wanted to express their hatred, to tell him they hoped he would die (Remnick, 1998). Similar to Jack Johnson, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, all threats to white supremacist ideology, Ali received death threats and hate mail. Former white boxers Tunney and Dempsey publicly denounced Ali for his position on the war. Tunney told Ali that he "disgraced" the "title and the American flag," and Dempsey insinuated that it was "not safe for him to be seen on the streets" (Spivey, 1985).

In typical 1960s era sports journalism, most white sportswriters (especially older sportswriters) condemned Ali's position on the war and his decision to use his status as heavyweight champion to promote a political agenda (Remnick, 1998). Deviating from the usual racist editorials, so-called liberal newspapers such as the New York Post urged Ali to follow Louis's World War II example and called him a dangerous model for American youth (Spivey, 1985).

Undaunted, Ali remained steadfast and loyal to his views on the war and his religious obligation. Even when he was told he would not see action in the war and that his role would be like Louis in World War II, that of morale booster, Ali refused to participate. And rather than go into hiding, he confronted his adversaries much like he confronted his opponents in the ring, directly (Gorn, 1986). Outspoken and completely confident in his faith, Ali's stance became firmer as he awaited the government's decision. He made it clear that despite the cost to his career financially and otherwise, he would not compromise his convictions. More importantly, because Ali viewed the war as a white man's war against colored people, he rejected the idea of blacks, including himself, fighting on the side of the white man. Revealing the hypocrisy of the government's demand that he fight, Ali responded insightfully. "Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go ten thousand miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs?" (Remnick, 1998, p. 298). He went on to say, "If I thought going to war would bring freedom and equality to twenty-two million of my people, they wouldn't have to draft me. I'd join tomorrow. But I either have to obey the laws of the land or the laws of Allah. I have nothing to lose by standing up and following my beliefs. We've been in jail for four hundred years" (Remnick, 1998, p. 290).

Found guilty of evading the draft, Ali was sentenced to five years in prison and a $10,000, the maximum. Though he appealed the decision and eventually won, he did not box for three and a half years, losing the prime years of his boxing career (Remnick, 1998). Ultimately, Ali's decision cost him at least $10 in purses and endorsements, creating a tremendous financial burden for him and his family. Of lesser concern, his

decision also cost him the goodwill of many Americans who thought that he was a rich man in perfect health avoiding military service and using religion as an excuse (Remnick, 1998; Sammons, 1998; Spivey, 1985). Additionally, his passport was confiscated, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) put him under around-the-clock surveillance. J. Edgar Hoover got regular reports on everything from Ali's travels and phone calls to his appearances on television talks shows. He was considered in the eyes of the FBI, a greater subversive than Jack Johnson had ever been (Remnick, 1998). Ali would never publicly regret the price he paid for his antiwar actions. He watched his old friend from Louisville, Jimmy Ellis, and then Joe Frazier, take his title. Notwithstanding, 25 year-old Ali persevered. For a young black man in love with fame, there were greater priorities. "I was determined to be one nigger that the white man didn't get," Ali told Black Scholar magazine. "One nigger that you didn't get, white man. You understand? One nigger you ain't going to get" (Remnick, 1998, p. 291).

**Ban From Boxing: Ali Hits the Lecture Circuit**

Following his conviction and during the three years it took to appeal, Ali reinforced his political stand by traveling around the country on a speaking tour giving passionate talks on college campuses. These talks though not highly sophisticated or based on expert analysis, were powerful and incisive. Through his rhetoric Ali provided valuable insight on several social, political, and religious issues prevalent in America in the mid-to late 1960s. Themes included integration versus segregation, the Vietnam War, the lack of black pride and accusations of hatred of white people (Hauser, 1986). Regarding his perspective on integration and segregation, Ali believed in segregation in part because he did not find it rational to force integration. Influenced by the teachings of Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam, Ali rejected Martin Luther King's version of

equality and social justice. His rejection of integration preceded the Black Power movement by two years (Marqusee, 1999). Ali stated,

> Why ask me if I believe in segregation. I recognize the fact that you believe in it. What do you mean, you don't believe in it? Oh, man, you're crazy. Every city I go to, I can find a black neighborhood and a white neighborhood. How many Negroes live out here in this big old neighborhood? I'd like to see peace on earth, and if integrating would bring it, I'd say let's integrate. But let's just not stand still where one man holds another in bondage and deprives him of freedom, justice, and equality, neither giving him freedom or letting him go to his own (quoted in Hauser, 1991, p. 188).

In terms of the Vietnam War Ali's message addressed the hypocrisy of American diplomacy and American democracy. He often talked about the pointlessness of the war and the racism inherent in American foreign policy. Through his words, Ali affirmed that America's enemy was not his and American racism was his real foe. Ali's defiance regarding the war was more infuriating to whites because he was considered a sports hero who refused to play by the rules. Subsequently, it unleashed an angry and vengeful reaction from the highest levels of American government, including the FBI and the Supreme Court, for the greatest symbolic warrior had rejected his nation's imperialistic adventures and militaristic values (Sammons, 1999). Ali also shared his immense loyalty to Islam and Elijah Muhammad, both instrumental in his rejection of the Vietnam War in particular, and all wars in general.

Based on a sermon taught by a preacher named Brother John, Ali came to believe that true black identity was usurped when the white man began calling blacks Negro. In his sermon, Brother John unleashed a pivotal message that inspired Ali to study his history and reclaim the aspects of black and African culture lost in the translation of white racism. In an oracle style typical of black leaders in the 1960s, Brother John preached,

> Why are we called Negroes? It's the white man's way of taking away our identity. If you see a Chinaman coming, you know he's from China. If you see a Cuban coming, you know he comes from Cuba. If you see a Canadian coming, you know he comes from Canada. What country is called Negro? (Remnick, 1998, p. 128).

In his own words, Ali expanded on Brother John's analysis by providing concrete examples of the intersection between lack of black pride and the conspiracy of whiteness.

> We've been brainwashed. Everything good is supposed to be white. We look at Jesus, and we see a white with blond hair and blue eyes. We look at all the angels; we see white with blond hair and blue eyes. Now, I'm sure there's a heaven in the sky and colored folks die and go to heaven. Where are the colored angels? They must be in the kitchen preparing milk and honey. We look at Miss America, we see white. We look at Miss World, we see white. We look at Miss Universe, we see white. Even Tarzan, the king of the jungle in black Africa, he's white. White Owl Cigars. White Swan soap, White Cloud tissue paper, White Rain hair rinse, White Tornado floor wax. All the good cowboys ride the white horses and wear white hats. Angel food cake is the white cake, but the devils food cake is chocolate. When are we going to wake up as people and end the lie that white is better than black? (Hauser, 1991, p. 188).

Along with Ali's perspective on the lack of black pride and separatism, he was accused by some of espousing hatred and racism toward whites. Indeed, this accusation stemmed primarily from his membership in the NOI and his association with Malcolm X. In his lecture, Ali responded to these accusations in a clever, yet matter of fact manner,

> I don't hate nobody and I ain't killed nobody. We Muslims don't hate the white man. It's like we don't hate a tiger; but we know that a tiger's nature is not compatible with people's nature since tigers love to eat people. So we don't want to live with tigers. It's the same with the white man. The white race attacks black people. They don't ask what's our religion, what's our belief? They just start whupping heads. They don't ask you, are you Catholic, are you a Baptist, are you with Whitney Young? They just go whop, whop, whop! So we don't want to live with the white man; that's all (Hauser, 1991, p. 189).

Like Jack Johnson, Ali was considered a dangerous alien in his own land. As a black fighter, his actions in the ring offended and threatened many officials, fans, and casual observers. They believed his blatant displays of black cultural styles in body and language was corrupting the standards of athletic behavior. His "wolfing" or "trash

talking," his self-promotional poetry, and the so-called "Ali Shuffle" seemed to run contrary to the style of the beloved Joe Louis. If Joe Louis stood for quiet dignity then Ali represented loud arrogance (Gorn, 1986).

Ali represented what Robin G. Kelly, black scholar and writer, might call a multiple signifier of opposition – rejecting "American patriotism," integrationism, athletic codes of behavior, and obligatory black humility. Neither Ali's words nor his movements seemed appropriate for athletic heroes (Gorn, 1986). Ali's brutal defeat of Floyd Patterson following Patterson's public refusal to acknowledge his Muslim name was a testament to this. Both the media and the public was sickened and angered by this physical beating and the press denounced Ali in terms reminiscent of the racial and other epithets directed toward Johnson during his reign. Following his brutal defeat of Ernie Terrell, another patriot-integrationist who spoke out against him, calling him a black renegade, an onslaught of abuse again was heaped upon Ali and the negative Negro stereotypes emerged again (Spivey, 1985). Dismantling Patterson and Terrell made Ali the most reviled American athlete since Jack Johnson. At a time when black athletes were expected to be humble, deferential to whites, apolitical and good Negro role models, Ali flaunted conventional mores and publicly denounced the accommodationist stance of previous black titleholders (Gilmore, 1975; Spivey, 1985).

According to Hietala (2002), in a culture that defined black people in terms of group identity rather than by individual traits, a black athlete's achievements had ramifications for the entire race. Similarly, his private life had public consequences because of the white tendency to view the black celebrity as a representative of the whole group. So, black athletes could do much good with success and proper behavior, great

harm with failure and unsavory conduct. Given this inherently racist view of black athletes, Ali fell short of being considered a good role model or a "credit to his race." Unfortunately for white America, Ali was content with comparisons to Jack Johnson and not Joe Louis or Jessie Owens, both black athletes he considered to be the white man's hero. Like many blacks during the 1960s Ali awoke to the reality that black athletes were being used to cover up the transgressions of a repressive system. They no longer accepted the theory that the athletic accomplishments of blacks on the playing field were confirmation that the present system worked for all its citizens or that if the masses of blacks were competitive, disciplined, hardworking, patriotic, and God-fearing, they too could realize the American dream (Sammons, 1988).

In the later part of the 1960s when making his stand against the draft, many voices, radical and not, celebrated Ali as a figure of defiance and courage. Eldridge Cleaver, member of the Black Panther Party, described him as a "genuine revolutionary" and the first free black champion ever to confront white America (Remnick, 1998). Sonia Sanchez, poet and civil rights activist, was also impressed by Ali's heroic actions.

> It's hard now to relay the emotions of that time. This was still a time when hardly any well-known people were resisting the draft. It was a war that was disproportionately killing young black brothers, and here was this beautiful, funny, poetical young man standing up and saying no! Imagine it for a moment! The heavyweight champion, a magical man, taking his fight out of the ring and into the arena of politics, and standing firm. The message that sent! (Remnick, 1998, p. 290).

Support for the war declined as the nation grew weary of the ritual body counts from Saigon. It was no longer willing to wait for the government's promise of the "light at the end of tunnel." And perhaps equally significant, it had become clear to many, both black and white, that if nothing else, Ali was sincere about his opposition to the war. At a time when America was being torn apart, when the government was lying to its people,

he was speaking out (Hauser, 1991). Ali's response to the draft was a major boost to the anti-war movement. Not only were his views consistent with anti-war rhetoric, as a heavyweight boxer, and reigning champion, Ali added legitimacy to the movement. He was a figure from the mainstream of popular culture and one who could not be dismissed as "unmanly" or "cowardly." Ali was, and remained, by far the most famous of all anti-war heroes. Further more, he was black, and his association with anti-war feelings gave anti-war feelings legitimacy in black communities, which helped to erode the lily-white image of the war movement (Marqusee, 1999).

**Ali: Inspiration to Anti-War Movement**

Ali's refusal to go to Vietnam inspired young people, especially black Americans, profoundly. They admired him not only for the courage he displayed in challenging the government and the Vietnam War; they were also impressed with his genuine attitude and his accessibility to all people. They honored and revered him because not once did he waiver from his beliefs in favor of the opportunity to fight and make millions. Ali refused to accept the hero status bestowed upon him. Consistent with other explanations of his actions, Ali shared his version of his decision with Hauser (1991) when he said,

> I never thought of myself as great when I refused to go into the Army. All I did was stand up for what I believed. There were people who thought the war in Vietnam was right. And those people, if they went to war, acted just as brave as I did. There were people who tried to put me in jail. Some of them were hypocrites, but others did what they thought was proper and I can't condemn them for following their conscience either. People say I made a sacrifice, risking jail and my whole career. But God told Abraham to kill his son and Abraham was willing to do it, so why shouldn't I follow what I believed? Standing up for my religion made me happy; it wasn't a sacrifice. When people got drafted and sent to Vietnam and didn't understand what the killing was about and came home with one leg and couldn't get jobs, that was a sacrifice. But I believed in what I was doing, so no matter what the government did to me, it wasn't a loss (1991, p. 171).

During the era of black protest Ali was perhaps the most famous human being in the world and was arguably one of the most prominent young leaders of the great freedom struggles in American history. His style both in and outside the ring was unique and refreshing. He was outrageous, yet deadly serious about the social commitments that mattered. Unlike most black leaders during his time, Ali brought warmth, audacious humor and charm to his crusades (Gorn, 1986). Nonetheless, because of his popularity among most blacks and some whites, he remained a threat to the status quo throughout the 1960s. His critical rhetoric at a time when great questions about the future of America were being raised, touched the sensibilities of whites, many of whom were moved to question old attitudes and behaviors toward blacks; none were affected more than white students, especially whites students involved in the peace movement (Sammons, 1988).

As a fighter, as a performer, as a man of independence and American originality, Ali transcended the worlds of Joe Louis, Sonny Liston and Floyd Patterson, all successful black boxers who succumbed to accommadationist values (Remnick, 1998). Determined to be more like Jack Johnson than Joe Louis, Ali's powerful presence posed a considerable dilemma for whites who were unaccustomed to blacks taking liberties reserved for whites. In the words of the late great James Baldwin, literary icon and social critic,

> Any upheaval in the universe is terrifying because it so profoundly attacks one's sense of one's own reality. Well, the black man has functioned in the white man's world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations (1963, p. 9).

Like Jack Johnson, Ali attacked the core contradictions of American democracy. He exposed its hypocrisy and along with other black Americans dramatized the contradiction between the promise and the reality of American justice for all (Marqusee,

1999). Despised as an "uppity nigger" by whites, and revered as an "uppity nigger" by blacks, Ali was an effective agent of social change because he appealed to the common black folk in common black folk language. Stated differently,

> Ali straddled all of Black Power's constituencies – the cultural and the political, the anti-imperialists and the black capitalists – and he did it in a forum and language that gripped people in the streets. Ali illustrated a favorite Black Power tactic: the deployment of the black vernacular as a challenge to white assumptions and as a more realistic language than the honeyed words of the civil rights leaders. None of the Black Power's themes – black pride, economic and political independence, the emphasis on black American's African origins – were new. What was new was their penetration into black popular consciousness. In this context, Ali became a central point of reference, because he had been among the first to articulate the rudiments of black consciousness to a mass audience (Marqusee, 1999, p. 189).

Ali's emergence as a political counterforce to the establishment brought him instant vilification within the white establishment. He publicly urged political and social protest among blacks despite constant surveillance by whites. Indirectly, Ali inspired young sportswriters, college students, and others antagonized by current domestic and foreign policies and alienated by traditional social and cultural values (Spivey, 1985). Before the floodgates of the anti-war movement opened, Ali was essentially alone as a sports figure in his public protestation -- and because he was willing to sacrifice money and fame for his ideals, he was regarding as a subversive, a serious threat to American ideals (Marqusee, 1999; Spivey, 1985).

**Ali: Symbol of His Time**

Ali, in contrast to both Jack Johnson and Joe Louis, had a highly developed racial consciousness. With this racial consciousness, "Ali's message was racial pride, the glorification of being black, a refusal to accept that black was anything less than best; a demand for dignity and full entitlement for all black people" (Hauser, 1991, p. 206). For blacks, this ideology in the context of the turbulent 1960s was bold and precarious, and

grounds for reprisal from the dominant culture. Indeed, Ali suffered tremendously at the hands of whites for his political, religious and social views. "As a black fighter, Ali represented a distinct break from the past. He was neither, the humble Negro champion like Joe Louis nor the 'non-white' champion, Jack Johnson, who terrified whites by seeking white prerogatives" (Gorn, 1986, p. 159). His doctrine of separatism and black economic development were considered sinister transgressions, along with his name change, his religious conversion and his views on the Vietnam War. Perceived by whites as an "uppity Negro," Ali was forthcoming and frank about his disgust regarding the hypocrisy of American democracy and its treatment of people of color both at home and abroad. Throughout the 1960s, white racists resented everything Ali stood for. The white boxing establishment and the white public in general reacted harshly to identity politics.

## Introduction to Psychological Analysis of White Reaction to Muhammad Ali

White reaction to Muhammad Ali was analogous to that of Johnson because Ali was also controversial and perceived subversive by the dominant white society. In the context of the Civil Rights Era, Ali's views on Christianity and his refusal to enter the military draft threatened white ideals of American patriotism, eliciting deep-seated racial hatred. This racial hatred was unmistakably psychological in nature. In the following pages, I will take a closer look at this claim by utilizing the psychological dimensions discussed previously in this chapter.

## White Reaction to Conversion

Before Cassius Clay's February 1964 heavyweight championship bout with Sonny Liston, promoters of the fight learned of his conversion to the Nation of Islam. At the time, most Americans knew little about the organization as a whole, but were astutely aware of Malcolm X as a major leader in the Nation of Islam. As chief spokesman for the

Nation, "his fiery oratory and uncompromising challenges to authority made him one of the most feared men in America" (Sammons, 1988, p. 192). He articulated a black rage that some whites viewed as consistent with how many black Americans felt about their subordination. There was also widespread fear that Malcolm's rhetoric would come to fruition, avenging whites for decades of racial injustices (Sammons, 1988). Consequently, when Clay announced his conversion, there was considerable public concern about his potential influence on black Americans should he win. Prior to announcing his conversion, the fight was billed as a clash between good Negro (Clay) and bad Negro (Liston). Clay was the overwhelming underdog with no previous experience in a heavyweight title bout. Nonetheless, the general public, both black and white wanted him to prevail over Liston. When word leaked about his conversion, "backers of the fight were convinced that when fans learned of Clay's espousal of an alien religion and a radical political doctrine, they'd pray for the wolf to win." (Sammons, 1988, p. 194)

Almost immediately following Clay's upset defeat of Liston he was cast as a dangerous stranger in his own country (Sammons, 1988). One reporter maintained that the brash warrior "would fight with weapons never before carried into an American ring," including his faith in non-Western religion and his belief that "he was part of a global family on nonwhites among whom Caucasians were in turn a minority doomed to eventual defeat" (Sammons, 1988, p. 195). Since Clay's conversion took place during a time when blacks were demanding equal rights and recognition as full citizens, white fears and anxieties about blacks were heightened, in particular, white fear of black retaliation, black autonomy, black economic empowerment and black social upward

mobility. Overall, most whites during that time feared the Nation of Islam because members of this organization espoused an ideology of black independence from white control, celebrated negritude, and accused America of being a racially oppressed society (Gorn, 1986). Indeed, Black Muslims, Clay included, expected nothing from white America, seeking self-preservation and separatism instead (Marqusee, 1999).

Black separatism, in contrast to white segregation, was defined as a final solution to the problem of racial abuse blacks endured in trying to create an integrated society (Chehade, 2001). "Black separatism is based on repairing damage within the community, away from the destructive forces of White power" (Chehade, 2001, p. 73). Contrary to white perception, the NOI was not advocating black domination and white subordination (the model for white segregation), instead, supporters of black separatism wanted to live in an environment where the forces of white supremacy would be mitigated by focusing on black economic, political and social sufficiency. By eliminating contact with white racism, proponents of black separatism envisioned an environment where blacks would be encouraged to be proud, dignified, and prosperous (West, 2001). Black autonomy, which was synonymous with black power, was a declaration of independence from white power, notably white political power.

Regardless of the legitimacy of this ideology, whites viewed the black separatist mentality as a strategy to undermine and abolish white supremacy. Indeed, it was an approach to black liberation that both threatened and challenged white identity and white power. When blacks agitated and demanded integration, the white power structure had the authority to control and influence when, where, and how integration was instituted. On the other hand, when a small minority of blacks rejects the prevailing desire to

integrate opting for separation instead, white control and authority is presumably alleviated. This was precisely the thinking of many whites for which black separatism was a frightening proposition. The fear that blacks could circumnavigate white authority by electing to operate outside the parameters of the dominant culture had an enormous impact on how whites responded to Clay's conversion.

To be sure, many whites, including predominately white institutions such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the World Boxing Association (WBA), alleged Clay's victory over Liston symbolically legitimized this radical agenda. Provoked by fear of their influence on the black community and other oppressed groups across the country, the FBI began monitoring Clay, Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam shortly following Liston's defeat. Similarly, with intense pressure from white Americans both journalistic and lay, the WBA suspended Ali's title (while simultaneously threatening to revoke it) for what they considered "conduct detrimental to the spirit of boxing." (Sammons, 1988, p. 196) Although the three major state athletic commissions (New York, California, and Pennsylvania) refused to support the WBA action, boxing promoters, politicians, and the media all sensed that the time was not right for a blatantly racist campaign to neutralize Ali. Without a doubt, this would come later when Ali refused the draft.

**From Cassius Clay to Muhammad Ali: What's in a Name?**

When Cassius Clay changed his name from Cassius Marcellus Clay to Cassius X Clay, few eyebrows were raised. Then, on a Chicago radio broadcast Elijah Muhammad announced, "This Clay name has no divine meaning. I hope he will accept being called by a better name. Muhammad Ali is what I will give him for as long as he believes in Allah and follows me" (Hauser, 1991, p. 102). White reaction to his acceptance of his Muslim new name was conspicuous. The press was stunned and the general public

(including blacks initially) were suspicious. At this point in his career, Ali had recently claimed the heavyweight crown and his involvement in the Nation of Islam (NOI), though threatening to whites had not been perceived as a sustained commitment. Nonetheless, by changing his name, Ali solidified what most whites and some blacks had feared – a bona fide Black Muslim heavyweight champion.

Almost immediately, Ali's name change provoked a range of emotional reactions from whites including anger, rage and fear. Akin to his rejection of Christianity, Ali's name change was interpreted by whites as contempt for whites and American ideals, both indictments for a black American in the 1960s (Gorn, 1986) "By adopting the name Muhammad Ali at the command of Elijah Muhammad, Cassius Clay claimed a new heritage, a new nation, a new family. And in doing so, he exposed order as something other than a fact of nature" (Marqusee, 1999, p. 86) In rejecting what he proclaimed as his slave name, Ali signaled no desire to ingratiate himself with mainstream America. Unlike Johnson and Louis who were endowed their public identities by the white press, in assuming the name "Muhammad Ali" at the beginning of his career, Ali was unequivocal in declaring his intention to create his own (Marqusee, 2000). Whereas Louis and Johnson fit reality neatly into the social space allotted to blacks, Ali went beyond white limits of acceptability in his beliefs and behaviors (Gorn, 1986).

Ali faced entrenched resistance for changing his name (Hauser, 1991; Marqusee, 1999; Sammons, 1988). For example, the New York Times insisted on calling him Cassius Clay throughout the nineteen sixties. Other media outlets also refused to use his new name, though not for as long as the New York Times. Two weeks after the re-naming, Ali walked out of Madison Square Garden when the announcer and president of

Madison Square Garden Boxing insisted on introducing the new champion, a ringside guest, as Cassius Clay (Hauser, 1991; Marqusee, 1999). Ali left the arena to a chorus of boos from the crowd – evidence that it was not only the media that was against him (Hauser, 1991).

Clearly, Ali's name change publicly confirmed his allegiance to the Nation of Islam. As a Black Muslim, he was considered a villain seeking to misappropriate boxing and the national stage it provided to espouse hate and anti-American sentiments. Psychologically, Ali's name change and his association with the Nation of Islam elicited white fear and provoked widespread racial anxiety. His rejection of white society, refusal to be an Uncle Tom or "a white man's black man," made white Americans uncomfortable. White America's inability to control Ali's convictions, his image, and his loyalty to black people and the Nation of Islam caused whites to perceive him as a threat to the status quo; loathing almost everything he stood for. Driven by fear, anxiety and racial hatred, whites retaliated against Ali through various techniques including excluding him from professional boxing, stripping him of his heavyweight title and his livelihood. Muslim doctrine gave Ali the faith and single-mindedness to combat racial and religious injustices, however, it did not protect him from death threats, harassing phone calls, hate mail, blatantly racist television and print coverage, and several bomb threats to his home (Gorn, 1986; Hauser, 1991; Spivey, 1985). Ali sympathizers were also subjected to Ali-inspired backlash. For example, hate mail inundated Howard Cosell, sports anchor friend when he began using the Ali's Muslim name (Gorn, 1986).

> When Cosell faulted officials for revoking Ali's title before he was convicted of any crime, the volume and vehemence of the complaints increased – "tens of thousands of letters," Cosell recalled, "directed to me, beginning with the general refrain, 'You nigger-loving Jew bastard'" (Gorn, 1986, p. 141).

**Draft Evasion and Vietnam War: Ali the Anti-American**

Three years after the WBA threatened to strip Ali of his first title for his religious and political views, a federal court found him guilty of draft evasion. "The chief prosecutor asked for leniency (the average sentence for refusing induction was 18 months), but Ali received the maximum penalty of five years in prison and a $10,000 fine" (Spivey, 1985, p. 173). Immediately, the New York State Athletic Commission stripped him of his title and within a month, other athletic commissions followed suit, refusing to recognize him as the heavyweight champion. His license was rescinded consequently denying him of the right to earn a living (Marqusee, 1999; Sammons, 1988). Ali's refusal to be "co-opted" by the establishment like his predecessor Joe Louis was the primary motivation for this action against him. "The government plan required Ali to replay the role Joe Louis had performed in World War II as morale builder and role model for blacks. In exchange Ali would be guaranteed no combat duty" (Gorn, 1986, p. 165). While Louis responded to the government's call, Ali refused all offers, remarking, "I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong" (Gorn, 1986; Hauser, 1991; Sammons, 1988).

To his enemies, refusing to serve his country made Ali an unpatriotic draft-dodger (Hauser, 1991). And while the vast majority of white Americans applauded the vengeance wrought in the courts and the boxing organizations, he continued to receive hate mail, death threats, and vilification in the press (Spivey, 1985) Unfortunately, Ali's "Vietcong" remark and his general views on the Vietnam War came about at a time when many Americas had not yet turned against the war, further highlighting his opposition (Hauser, 1991). Ali's "defiance against having to be the good Negro, the good Christian waiting to be rewarded by the righteous white provider," (Remnick, 1998, p. 212)

epitomized a lot of black emotions at a time when the urban black population was growing increasingly frustrated and embittered by racism and class oppression.

Unlike Joe Louis and other black heavyweight prizefighters (Floyd Patterson, Ernie Terrell, to name a few) who were publicly deferential to the racial stereotype of the submissive Negro, Ali did nothing to assuage white anxieties and fear regarding changes in race relations (Spivey, 1985). By rejecting the grateful Negro role reserved for black athletes, Ali heightened white fear of the militant black man. In an era where black people were openly hostile toward white authority for its widespread hypocrisy and racism, whites perceived Ali to be the political counterforce necessary to inspire unrest in the South and in urban communities across the country. The fear and anxiety Ali provoked was manifested in white America's preoccupation with vilifying him, thereby diminishing his credibility. White reaction to Ali was representative of the underlying fear and anxiety most white Americans had concerning black progress during the Civil Rights Era. In addition to responding emotionally to Ali's political and religious positions, whites also projected their fears and anxieties onto him, thereby making him responsible and deserving of white racial hatred. Since white America burdened Ali with its anxieties and ambivalences, its treatment of the champion was a reflection of its own self-assessment (Spivey, 1985).

**Uppity Negro**

Even in the ring Ali's actions offended and threatened many officials, fans, and casual observers (Gorn, 1986) "They believed he was corrupting the standards of athletic behavior with his blatant displays of black cultural styles in body and mouth" (Gorn, 1986, p. 161). His loud mouth, self-promoting, trash talking antics, along with the "Ali Shuffle," seemed to run contrary to whites expected of black athletes – especially black

boxers (Gorn, 1986). With constant comparisons to Joe Louis, who was instructed by his managers to exude a quiet dignity so as not to offend the white establishment, Ali violated (black) athletic codes of behavior and obligatory black humility (Gorn, 1986). While Ali danced around the ring with agility, grace, and rhythm, reminiscent of Johnson, he verbally taunted opponents, mocking them with his dazzling shuffle. In doing so, he not only revolutionized boxing style, more importantly, he further removed the sport from white control in a cultural and symbolic sense (Gorn, 1986; Sammons, 1988; Spivey, 1985).

By all accounts, Ali was a "bad Negro," especially from the point of view of whites. Despised for his antiestablishment mentality, Ali epitomized the autonomous black man whites had come to loathe and fear. Angry politics and religion engulfed Ali, but he remained steadfast in his convictions, often exacerbating white anxiety. He embraced Johnson and was openly hostile towards Louis, calling him an Uncle Tom and a race traitor (Gorn, 1986; Hauser, 1991). Ali's lack of false bravado aggravated whites immensely. Before 1970 when his license was restored, he acquiesced to not one white expectation of him. Perhaps most importantly, Ali forced whites to confront the hypocrisy of American democracy -- as well as get in touch with their own individual and collective racism. In response whites accused Ali of being a racist black man, in effect scapegoating him as a way to avoid confronting their unpleasant racial attitudes and behaviors. Ironically, those accusing Ali of being a racist became indignant about racism only when it was perceived as a threat to whiteness (Chehade, 2001).

White obsession regarding Ali and his conduct both in and outside the ring was a reflection of the psychological mechanisms underlying white racist attitudes and behavior

during the Civil Rights Era. With the emergence of Ali and the Nation of Islam, white racial anxiety and fear of black unrest played a crucial role in white reaction to Ali. In the conclusion of his essay *Ali and the Age of Bare-Knuckle Politics*, Thomas Hietala asserts, "Ali gained celebrity at a troubled time, but the time did not define him, nor did he symbolize his time." He continues, "His story, then, reveals a complicated symbiosis between character and context, not 'history all over again' but history unique in time and place" (Gorn, 1986, p. 147). I quote Hietala to say this: I disagree with Hietala's assessment that the era did not define Ali. I contend the time, in particular, white reaction to Ali at this moment in history, is largely responsible for how Ali has been canonized. White reaction to Ali in my view played a significant role in defining and shaping how we have come to know Ali. By eliciting psychological mechanisms such as fear and anxiety, the story of Ali reveals not a complex symbiosis between Ali's character and white reaction to his character. But instead, it is my assessment that the context (the Civil Rights Era) provided the script for how whites reacted to Ali. Had Ali remained Christian and Cassius, for example, white reaction to him would have been less volatile and alienating.

The careers of Jack Johnson and Muhammad Ali were reflective of white hatred and bigotry. Both fighters, despite performing in different eras, where subjected to scrutiny and limitations for disobeying white expectations of black athletes, thus, threatening the racial hierarchy. Through analyzing white reaction to their exploits both in and outside the ring, psychological factors such as fear, anxiety, and guilt, to name a few, are implicit in the psychology of white racism.

# CHAPTER 5

# PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO WHITE RACISM: IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

## Implications of Study

Ostensibly, discussion of the psychology of white racism offers an alternative perspective on racial discourse, primarily focusing on white attitudes and behaviors instead of black victimization. In addition to offering an alternative perspective, the study of the psychological dimensions of white racism offers clear examples of how whites are dehumanized and victimized by white racism even though white racism was not intended to target whites (i.e., spectacle lynchings, Jim Crow segregation, and white race riots). In other words, by exploring the psychology of white racism, the unintended consequences of this form of oppression are uncovered and exposed. By exploring the psychology of white racism, particularly from a historical perspective, white people are forced to confront how they have been victimized by the invention and maintenance of white racial supremacy.

White opposition to affirmative action and white reaction to the influx of immigrants are just two contemporary examples of how the outcome of this analysis help us to better understand the dynamics white racism as it relates to the threat to white racial dominance. Often white reaction to these aforementioned situations are explained or rationalized without examining the underlying psychological factors contributing to white resistance to increased participation of people of color in the social, economic and political arenas throughout American society. For example, some whites claim affirmative action is an unfair method of "righting the wrongs" of the past, giving blacks and other racial minorities access to jobs and education without consideration of merit or

ability. This kind of verbal opposition often functions to mask the underlying fear and anxiety associated with white perception that affirmative action might ultimately topple white domination of economic upward mobility.

## Future Research

While I am satisfied with the outcome of this study, it is clear to me that a more comprehensive and well-researched theory is necessary to legitimately position the psychology of white racism firmly in the discourse on racism. Therefore, in terms of future research, I propose the development of such theory. Additionally, I would like to explore further the link between black masculinity and the psychology of white racism in contemporary American society.

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